ORAL EPICS OF KALAHANDI

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Oral Epics of Kalahandi

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I dedicate this book to my parents

late Sri Anantaram Mishra, and

late Smt. Bedamati Mishra.

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Preface

The study of oral epics is a new area of research in Folkloristics. Earlier, western scholars studied oral epics, but now it has become one of the emerging genres of folklore research. Milman Parry studied Homeric epics and contributed to the study of oral epics by comparing it with written epics. This came to be known as Oral Formulaic Theory in the study of epic literature. After him, Albert B. Lord undertook a research on Yugoslavian epics, which strengthened and established the [1]comparative study of oral and written epics (Foley 1988: 155).

According to Foley, Parry and Lord established a new discipline which was widely accepted throughout the world in the study of literature *(Ibid)*. Contemporary scholars such as Walter J. Ong, Joseph Duggan, Berkley Peabody, Michael Nagler, Gerald Else, and Ruth Finnegan expanded the horizon of the study of oral epics through their field research in western countries. The purpose of such research was to know the composition of the oral epics present among the oral singers and to examine the recurring epic formulae before the emergence of written epics. They also tried to understand the contribution of tradition-oriented epics in the construction and composition of written epics by great poets. The objective was to understand and establish how oral epics in performance substantially contributed in framing the written epics in terms of form and content, and style and meter. David E. Bynum, Alain Renoir, Richard Janko, and Werner H. Kelber contributed to western oral literary tradition. Afterwards, the study of oral narratives in performance context became prominent. Thus, study of epics was a shift from the text to composition-in-performance during this period.

During the period 1960-1990s, western scholars initiated their efforts to study the epics of Africa. In fact, Africa is a country with abundant ethnic lore representing the mythological and historical account of the land and people.

African and western scholars such as Isidore Okpewho[2] (Okpewho 1979), John William Johnson, and Daniel Biebuyck[3] (Biebuyck 1969) intensively studied the oral epics of Africa and discovered the rich African oral epic tradition-in-performance present in the society. Scholars such as Richard Dorson[4] (Dorson 1972), Felix J. Oinas, Axel Olrik, Dan Ben-Amos, and Ruth Finnegan studied the epics of Africa. Recently, scholars such as Isidore Okpewho, M.M. Mulokozi, Stephen Belcher,[5] Jan Knappert (on Swahili epic), and Dwight F. Reynolds from African countries studied African epics from a native's

point of view, which was close to the function and meaning of using the genre. Isidore Okpewho emphasized the traditional African art in general and analysed the cultural resources available in the community. He also studied the form and structure, and the narrative style of oral epics in Africa in *The Epic in Africa*. Stephen Belcher in his *Epic Traditions of Africa* has mentioned the wide spectrum of oral epics encompassing greater Africa. His diachronic study on epics in relation to history, caste genealogies, and myths presents an exploratory world of epics prevalent in Africa.

The study of oral epics took a concrete shape with the persistent efforts of Alan Dundes and John Miles Foley. Foley studied the Serbo-Croatian oral epics and his research established the scientific analysis of text and performance followed by a critical analysis of the grammar of oral epics. Minna Skafte Jensen, Joseph Harris, and Dell Hymes also contributed to enriching the European epics through their work. Similarly, Karl Reichl and Arthur Hatto studied Turkish epics and Siberian epics, respectively, and the cultural identity of many countries was explored.

In Europe, Finnish folklorist, Lauri Honko pioneered the study of oral epics. Under his leadership, Folklore fellows of oral epics across the globe were contacted through a global network. The efforts were to discover epics around the world through documentation, transliteration, translation, editing, analysis, and textualization.[6] This was to understand the epics from a composition-in-performance context, which was extensively studied and processed. Even the ethnography of singers, the performance-audience relation, classification, and textualization were given more emphasis. This led Honko to study *Kalevala*, the heroic epic of Finland. Honko visualized oral epics around the globe and created a common platform for all the epic scholars to understand and concretize this discipline. Anna-Leena Siikala (Maori epics), Juha Pentikäinen (Nanaj Shamanic epic), Ånniki Kaivola-Bregenhoj,[7] Satu Apo and many scholars studied oral epics across the world and contributed to the availability of a variety of epic performance and texts, which substantially strengthened the discipline.

Gradually, epic study attracted the attention of many scholars. The scholarly work of western scholars helped others to have a new look at the epics available in their localities. With the emergence of ethnic identity consciousness of small language groups, study of folklore and oral epics became more relevant in terms of its contribution to national identity. Many nations have their own epics, which represent the cultural roots and living heritage of their country and help reconstruct the cultural links of one nation with another.

India, as a land of living epic traditions has retained its many epics through its caste *(jati)* and language systems. Each caste has its own caste history associated either with a sage/god/goddess or with kings of the solar/lunar dynasty. Before the 1980s, the study of folklore was gaining ground in India, but it was mainly based on textual analysis. It was only during the 1980s that the Central Institute of Indian Languages, with the participation of American scholars, initiated the study of oral epics in a symposium with a hope to explore the possibilities of expanding folklore studies on oral epics in India.[8] Peter J Claus (Tulu epic), Susan Wadley *(Dholamaru)*, Heda Jason *(Mahabharata)*,

Frank Korom *(Mangal kavya)*, Alf Hiltebeitel (on goddess Draupadi), Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger *(Pandawani)*, Stuart Blackburn (Tamil epics), Brenda E.F. Beck (Tamil epics), David Shulman (Tamil epics), G.H. Roghair (Telugu epics), William Sax (*Garhwali* epics), John Smith (Rajasthani epic along with Sanskrit *Mahabharata*), and John Brockington and Mary Brockington (Sanskrit *Ramayana*) conducted intensive studies and explored the rich treasure of oral epics in India. The best field to understand oral epics in performance-context is always available in many regions in the cultural mosaic of India with hundreds of variations. Multi-lingualism and multi-ethnic contexts of India have given a variety to the cultural landscape in which the epic tradition in this country has been shaped. This tempted the scholars to understand the multi-dimensional epic tradition of India.

During the 1990s, Lauri Honko took up an oral epic project in Kannada region and documented the Siri epic with the help of Indian scholars Vivek Rai, Chinnappa Gowda and others.[9] This group textualized the epic in performance-context through the documentation of Siri epics. This helped Indian folklorists to explore the rich oral tradition of many regions of India. It is true that epics are found both in oral and written form in many regional (scheduled) languages. But epics are sung and performed in many local languages by many linguistic and ethnic groups. The specialty of Indian epics is that it is available in both oral and written forms[10] (Ramanujan 1986:4-5). Again, distinguishing the oral epics from the *Lokpurana* from Kannada context, Ramanujan has mentioned how the myths and epics in Indian oral and written traditions have separate functions and create counter texts as opposed to Sanskrit texts[11] (Ramanujan 1999: 517).

On the epics of India, Honko writes,

> India is the motherland of epics, where parallel streams of oral and written epics have flown for centuries. The conflux of these streams has brought about changes in ideology; the classical epic story has been used in post-classical folk epics as a tool in propagating a new religious worldview and a new legitimating of ritual. (Honko: *Ibid*)

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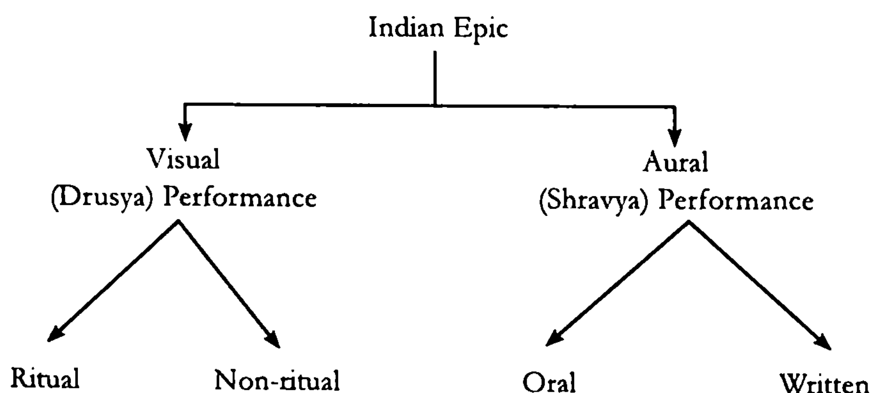
My collection and documentation of oral epics of Kalahandi was a work of inquisitiveness. It was an interesting job for me to reach out to the epic singers, collect and document data, translate and observe the data, and to interpret it from the singers' and audience's point of view. As I belong to the locality and have access to epic singers and understand their poetic language, it was easy for me to conduct the fieldwork. I collected data from the field and it was not difficult for me to translate the data. Besides oral performance, performance of epic-drama *(Drusya Kavya)* is also staged in most of the villages, and from my childhood I have seen these epic performances at night. This is the way the non-literate and literate people come together and enjoy the text, understand, internalize, and learn the morals of the stories.

India is a land of living epic tradition. It would not be surprising if someone meets the epic hero Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita on the road performing on their journey from one street to another during festivals such as *Dasahara* or *Chaitra* (Spring Festival). Similarly, *Srikrishna Leela* during *Janmastami* – birth of Srikrishna (August) and

Ram *leela* during Ram *navami* - birth of Rama (April) are staged and performed with rituals. The whole village becomes a part of the performance. The combination of epic performances and rituals in the Indian stage connects the past with the present, cutting across time and space. The audience has a certain role to play. If a performer appears as a mythical character (Hanuman, or Rama, or Krishna) in front of somebody's house, the household cannot just ignore him/her, but has to worship him.

I cannot silence the experience I had during my childhood. *Karnarjun*, an episode from the *Mahabharata*, was staged in a village. When the folk-drama was in progress, Srikrishna appeared on the stage with the Pandavas. Suddenly, the staging of the drama was stopped and the women from the audience began coming on to the stage to worship Lord Krishna by touching his feet. This went on until the last woman had worshipped the person acting as Lord Krishna. All the women offered coins at the feet of the actor on stage. People considered him as the incarnation of Lord Krishna and also touched his feet. This signifies the connectedness of the audience with the mythical characters of the Indian sacred texts.

Indian epics are found in two forms: *drusya kavya* (visible epic) and *shravya kavya* (audible epic). The performance is both oral and visual *(drusya)*, the recitation of which is found in both oral and written forms. In the textual analysis, only the text of the epic is discussed and the performance is ignored. This is even evident in the literary criticism where the text dominates over the performance context. In the study of oral epics, we try to understand the text from its performance context. This is the shift from text to performance in the study of oral epics.



Performance of epics has a symbiotic relation with the performers and the community. People patronize ritual performance as a part of their life cycle, which is symbolized in their customs and rituals. But written epics, or at best reproductions of the same content in any other form, are confined to desk work. Therefore, study of oral epic itself is a study of epic in living tradition. People can visualize how and why the community owns the epic in their social and individual life. Its socio-religious functions are necessary for regulating the group as well as maintaining group identity.

When the scholars were interested in oral epics and approached the singers' class, people began discussing the importance of the epics, myths, and caste genealogies. Therefore, some educated people from the tribal community have been taking an interest in these songs. I have personally attended many a *Jati Mahasabha* (traditional tribal social organizations) of the Gonds, Binjhal, Gaurs, and Kondhs and they feel encouraged when they come to know that these forgotten art forms are important for scholarly research. Interestingly, when the oral epics were presented to them in their meeting in a book-form, many people took those books to preserve in their house, considering their lost stories to be available in printed form.

During the period 1986-1992, I studied folklore as a part of my project in Kalahandi and conducted extensive fieldwork. This work was self-motivated and self-directed, because it was my own locality and I had no university or institute to support or promote my work. My study of folklore was therefore more experiential than desk work. I had witnessed the oral epic singers while conducting my fieldwork on folklore. The epic genre was unknown to me until I read the article Folk Epic written by Felix J. Oinas in Dorson's *Folklore and Folklife* (1972). I also studied the work of Alan Dundes and Albert B Lord. My exposure to Sanskrit and Oriya literature helped me discover the areas of oral epic genre from the field. Axel Olrik's work on 'epic laws', *The Mwindo Epic* of Daniel Biebuyck, and the *Essays on Folklore* by Dan Ben-Amos were the reference materials I had with me to concretize my experience and ideas on western epics and accordingly study Indian oral epics in the field. These materials led me to make an enquiry into the field to see if any folk singer performed the epic.

At this point, it may be proper to say that study of oral epics was not considered as a part of literary discourse in India till the 1980s. The folklorists had shaped the study of oral epics in performance context, and had proved that oral epics in performance are a 'tradition-oriented genre' which has its own existence with the community's patronization. Therefore, while studying the oral epics I was aware that the content, context, and language of the epic needs to be understood from the singers' point of view. Fortunately, it has been observed that folklorists and Indologists have studied Indian texts from its own cultural context than comparing the item with the western model, which may not be feasible in all cases.

Thus, the contribution of western scholars to understand oral epics through a systemic approach (going beyond the texts and delving into the context, performance, grammar of the epic, form and structure, ethnography of the singers, community response etc.) has been immensely helpful to understand the literary discourse in written and oral form, as an expressive tradition. Similarly, the function of oral epics and myths in contemporary society and its relevance in the present socio-cultural scenario is also equally necessary to be understood.

In Indian context, many ethnic groups have rich folklore owing to their ethno-linguistic variations. The ethnic groups maintain their caste identity through their language and folklore, and the caste singers maintain it. Many languages and many cultures have not had a problem because the elements of culture in many communities

are commonly expressed in different languages, equally maintaining their own cultural sub-system in their family or clan. I found that some ethnic groups have epic singers. They sing their caste myths, caste genealogies attached to their land, language, clan, and family heritage. At the same time, they have equal access to the great epics such as the *Mahabharata, Ramayana, Harivamsa,* and *Chandi Purana.* Therefore, I found that in some cases, the epic singers have adopted and reinterpreted the characters and events of classical epics into their own cultural context.

In 1986, I found Bhajan Nial, a singer of the Gaur (cultivator) community in Kapsi village, who recited a narrative song. The context was Ganesh *Puja*, and at 9 p.m., when the audience was ready to have a music programme, Bhajan Nial was eager to sing. The young men who were interested in singing film songs objected to this, but I pursued Bhajan Nial to sing and he sang a song that was about an hour long. The story was amazingly new to me and to all those present. While listening to the song, I recorded it and the audience wondered why I was interested in recording such songs. The story was about a woman who was abducted by the devil king and the efforts of her husband to rescue her. This was my first experience in witnessing a long sung narrative. The song was *Kotrabaina–Ramela,* a heroic epic. After I collected the epic narration, I analysed the epic and wrote the article Folk Epics of Western Orissa, which was published in the *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies,* (March 1990). Again I collected some oral epics and found that the singers of ethnic wisdom were also strong in recreating the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in their local imagination moulding the themes suitable to their socio-religious setting. I wrote two papers on this. One is influence of the Ramayana tradition in the *Folklore of Central India* and the other is a hero of Mahabharata in the *Folklore of Central India.* John Brockington, Lauri Honko and Peter J. Claus read these papers and encouraged me to work on this genre. They suggested me to work on this genre especially in those areas where it was available.

In January 1995, a symposium organized by the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) was held at Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore. I met Lauri Honko, Peter J Claus, John Brockington, John Miles Foley, Anniki Kaivola-Bregenhoj, and Carsten Bregenhoj. We had a good interactive session on epic literature. Peter Claus wanted me to write a section on tribal oral epics of Central India for his encyclopaedia of South Asian folklore.

I presented a paper on ethnic identity and oral narrative with the finding that smaller the ethnic group, then stronger their ethnic culture is. They retain their language and folklore more meaningfully than the assimilated one. I thank Jawaharlal Handoo, the organizer of ISFNR, who gave me an exposure to the greater folklore world. In fact, this was the gateway to my exposure to global folklore scholarship. Later, reading this paper, Steven Wolin (Professor, George Washington University), a medical psychiatrist, and his wife Sybil Wolin came to me and discussed the paper I had written about the narrative therapy for the tribes, who like to energize their generations with a positive psychological sanction.

The scheme was in my mind. Meanwhile, in 1997, I wrote a paper Oral Epics in Kalahandi to present in an International Seminar titled 'Epics along the Silk Road: Katha Vachana and Katha Vachaka' organized by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi and UNESCO. My paper was a classificatory scheme on the resources of oral epics in Kalahandi. This paper was based on epic singers, epic composition, transformation, content, and context. After listening to a presentation by Kapila Vatsayan, an eminent Indologist and cultural leader in India, I was inspired to work on this genre. She was critical about my western folklore model. But she advised me to not be fixed on a model but to understand the text from a cultural point of view than be fascinated by theories and instead, to find the why and how of epic singers and the reasons for the community to accept them despite social change. This idea helped me learn from the singers and to get the cultural meaning of the epics.

In September 2001, National Folklore Support Centre in Chennai invited me to attend a seminar on Folklore. M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director of NFSC supported me with a fellowship to take up research work on oral epics in Kalahandi. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to be in the field for a year during 2002-2003, when I collected the epics as planned.

The problem with collection of data on oral epics during 2001-2002 was that the senior singers, whom I met between 1985 and 1991, were no more alive. Four epic singers: Bhajan Nial (Kapsi), Bhainra Punji (Sinapali), Narahari Bandichor (Phulchi), and Jagannath Ghogia (Khalna) had expired. They were rich repositories of epics. So I had to search for other senior singers. The next generation was immature. I had to search for seniors, and, because of my long association with the ethnic groups I knew them. I had to tour extensively for almost eight months. I had to use both the situations, that is, singing either in a simulated situation or in a performance context. I attended the rituals to see how the oral texts were performed or chanted in the rituals. The non-verbal texts are more critical and complex. Deciphering the meaning of non-verbal texts in ritual context is a complex matter in understanding the relevance of the text.

During my fieldwork, the singers whom I wanted to visit were sometimes not available. They might have gone to their patrons' house. Sometimes I would come across a Parghania (Gond Bard), with a fiddle *(vana)* hung on his shoulder, accompanied by his wife, riding on a horse or taking shelter along the roadside. The singer was on a tour to his clan master's house.

The Parghanias, the Boguas, and the Ghogias (clan bards) were not ready to sing unless their clan master ordered them to do so. Some of them would not sing in front of an audio tape recorder, because of the fear of being unable to perform better, and became nervous. Another threat to them was that if their esoteric knowledge was recorded or printed, then no one would respect them after the printed text was published and made available. Young singers were ignorant of the traditional knowledge. Luckily, I managed to get the *Bhima Sidi* sung by two different tribes on different occasions. While the *Bhima Sidi* is sung by the Gurumai, the women priest among the Bhunjia, the Bogua

(male singer of the Kondhs) also sing it. In addition, I also compared the variants of *Bhima Sidi* collected by a scholar Sri Dolagobinda Bisi, who had worked on the Bhima cult.

I have selected the Gonds and the Kondhs, the two major tribal groups, and the Bhunjia and the Kamar (Pahariya), two primitive tribes that are smaller in number. The Gaur or Gaur, a settled agriculturist caste, politically and culturally dominant next to the Gonds, have rich epic songs. I also selected a nomadic tribe called Banjara (salt traders) to document their heroic epics and other professional singers such as Parghania and Debgunia.

For me, understanding oral epics from a native point of view was not a problem at all. But I faced problems in putting the whole collection of data from seven communities into an analytical model and to know how these epics represent the culture of Kalahandi, as well as to fulfill my objective of putting them in a systematic manner.

Here I must admit that this is a study on oral epics in Kalahandi, which is the first of its kind. This is also an individual's work. I am not a trained folklorist. Although I feel comfortable as an interested fieldworker, I am not comfortable as a desk worker. I believe that whatever I see, observe, and interpret can be better presented in my vernacular language. Another issue is the grammar of the language in the epics, which I have deliberately not discussed. Therefore, the linguistic aspect of the epics needs separate research. Here, I have concentrated on the resources and ethnography of the singer. The text collected from the field was translated, as far as possible, without distorting the original meaning. I have tried to decipher the meaning from the oral tradition and from the performance context. The senior people are the best interpreters of their own culture. Culture bears symbols and the symbols bear meaning. Even then, translating the symbols of a culture into English is a difficult task. The texts of oral epics are translated into prose and poetry. The epic which I collected in the form of songs is translated into poetry and the prose narration (on request, in story-telling situation) is translated into prose form.

Here, I clarify that some of the texts presented in this volume are sung narratives accompanied with music, they have their own cultural and ritual performance contexts, and have singer communities, and they fulfil the need of epic characters and events as defined by the global epic scholars of contemporary folklore scholarship. They have their own opening and ending formulae. Frame repetitions and nucleus repetitions are very much present; intertextuality and inter-generic nature are found. The meter, rhythm, intonation, and recitation indicate the style of majestic singing. The body language of the singer reflects the theme more ethnically and symbolically. The divine and miraculous hero is fit for such description and the specialty is only endowed in the ethnic singer.

I have divided this book into fourteen chapters. Chapter one deals with a brief physical location and historical importance of Kalahandi. Eastern Kalahandi was part of the Naga region, and western Kalahandi was under the Chauhan rule. The social history and the caste–tribe relationship that forms the autonomous village rule in Kalahandi have been studied in this chapter.

Chapter two deals with the goals and objectives of the study. It includes the methodology, hypothesis, and expected outcome of the study. In this chapter, I have given a brief account of epic traditions prevalent in the written literature of Kalahandi adjoining the Naga and Chauhan dynasties, especially patronized by the royal people and their subjects. Power and religion have their epic traditions and myth-making mechanisms to validate their strength and glory. But parallelling the written tradition, there are oral epics and myths among many ethnic groups. Finding the link between the written epics and oral narratives is necessary.

Chapter three is based on the four kinds of singers available in the Kalahandi region. The resources of oral epics in Kalahandi in different cultural contexts are discussed in this chapter. The classificatory scheme of oral epics in Kalahandi according to the castes and tribes have been presented.

Chapters four to twelve is the presentation of oral epics, with a brief note on the tribes and their ethnic singers, and the text in detail. I have tried to translate the original narration and at the same time preserve its meaning also. After this, the content is analysed to help the readers understand the oral narration. While some oral epics are translated line by line, some are presented in prose form. This is due to the kind of data collection I have made. Thus, I have given the translated epic texts of seven communities. This also includes the semi-literary epics such as the drought song and the Kondh rebellion song. I have tried to interpret the texts from the cultural point of view. This method is to allow the text to determine the analysis rather than adopting an external method to determine the analysis.

Chapter thirteen is the inference of all the epic texts studied in this volume. I have tried to adopt the model of understanding the meaning from the texts and contexts.

Kalahandi is a place where the sub-system of Indian culture is alive with many of its art forms. Epic genre is among these art forms. Even though epic is an endangered genre, I still believe that if the community understands the necessity of it, it will reappear as another art form, perhaps in print or video form. After that, maybe the community will be sure to use these forms for their own cultural identity or a social necessity. Some may also use this cultural resource to gain socio-political recognition.

III

Till this day, Kalahandi is known for its drought and untoward happenings such as child selling, migration, and other man-made disparities. But this volume will reveal the picture of Kalahandi which stretches away from the remote past to the present. Perhaps, if the academic domain can return the information of the purpose and meaning of the epics relevant to the modern context in shaping their cultural and political identity, then the community will not hesitate to adopt the genre as a new art form. I am optimistic on seeing the Gonds construct a temple for Budha Deo, who was a legendary hero, and install the statue of the hero riding a horse, though the people of today do not know his story. The tribal temples and *gudi*, in particular, bear the mythic and heroic actions of their ancestors. While the ritual part is observed in the respective community and its origin is known only to the priests, or the singers, or the senior persons, it is necessary

to disseminate the story of their heroic actions to the younger generations. This has not happened with the epic heroes only, but also with freedom fighters, or social heroes who dedicated their lives for the community; but as they are local heroes, they are short-lived in the memory of the people. According to Lohia, it is surprising to note how three black Gods, Rama, Krishna, and Siva remain in the Indian culture since time immemorial, but how Buddha, the great reformer of India is forgotten by the common mass[12] (Lohia, 1966). The reason is because the national heroes, both from ancient and modern India, influenced the common mass so much that till date common people attach themselves to the divinity in universal characters and ignore the local heroes. But in tribal society, as a counter culture, many epic heroes and mythic heroes live among those who understand and perpetuate culture. Interestingly, when we say that folk epic is a rapidly vanishing genre, we also must know that epic has never been a popular genre accessible to everyone of the society. As epics bear the history and culture of mankind, this is a reflective genre, distributed among the senior people of the community.

During the course of my study, I received immense help, inspiration, and assistance from late Professor Lauri Honko, University of Turku. In fact, since 1990 he was motivating me when I was in the field. He was also very generous in sending me his edited and recent publication *Textualization of Oral Epics* (Honko:1999) on request. John Miles Foley, Professor and Head, Department of Oral Tradition, Missouri University, helped me a lot by providing the oral tradition and his valuable works on oral epic references to my organization *Adivasi Sanskruti Gabesana Parishad,* which is located in Sinapali village. Stephen Belcher, the noted African scholar, not only provided me his book *Epic Traditions of Africa,* but also went through my work and gave me valuable suggestions. Chao Gegin from China, John Smith from Mumbai, Anniki Kaivola-Bregenhoj, Dan Ben-Amos, Mary Ellen Brown of Indian University, Bloomington, and Birendranath Dutta, President of *Assam Sahitya Sabha,* Guwahati have inspired me greatly in my work. In addition, Fanindam Deo, a history scholar from Khariar, historian Sri Jitamitra Singh Deo (Raja of Khariar), and Sri Surendra Mishra, (my younger brother) a local ethnographer of Bhunjia and Gond culture, Sri Purusottam Singh Majhi, President Adibasi Sanskriti Gabesana Parishad, Sinapali and Sri Bijaya Nath have inspired me much to complete the work. Special thanks to Sri Duryodhan Majhi, present Minister Health and Family Welfare, Government of Orissa, who is the popular Gond leader of Boden Block for his endless support and inspiration in making my work successful.

I am also thankful to M. Shanmugam Pillai, Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies,* for his initial encouragement in getting my work published in the journal. I also thank Mare Kõiva and Ülo Valk of the Folklore Department, University of Tartu, for publishing two of my papers on folk epic of Orissa in their Folklore e-journal (www.folklore.ee/folklore).

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National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai, will bring the unknown chapters of the social history and cultural creativity of Kalahandi to a vast number of readers by publishing this book. Therefore, not only me, the people of Kalahandi will also be thankful to the Centre. To date, in the national scenario, Kalahandi is known for its drought, migration, child-trade, hunger, and deprivation. But this volume will reveal the beauty inherent in the memory of the people of Kalahandi bearing the co-existence of imagination with the reality.

Folklore in Kalahandi is like Indravati (a river in Kalahandi), which flows with its own rhythm. My words can be compared to a pot of water drawn from the flowing river, in trying to understand the entire history of the river. My role here is very limited like that of an oral singer, only to add to the understanding and to show a beautiful landscape, to listen to more music, and see more beauty and to explore more of human culture of the people of Kalahandi.

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Bhubaneswar
December 2007

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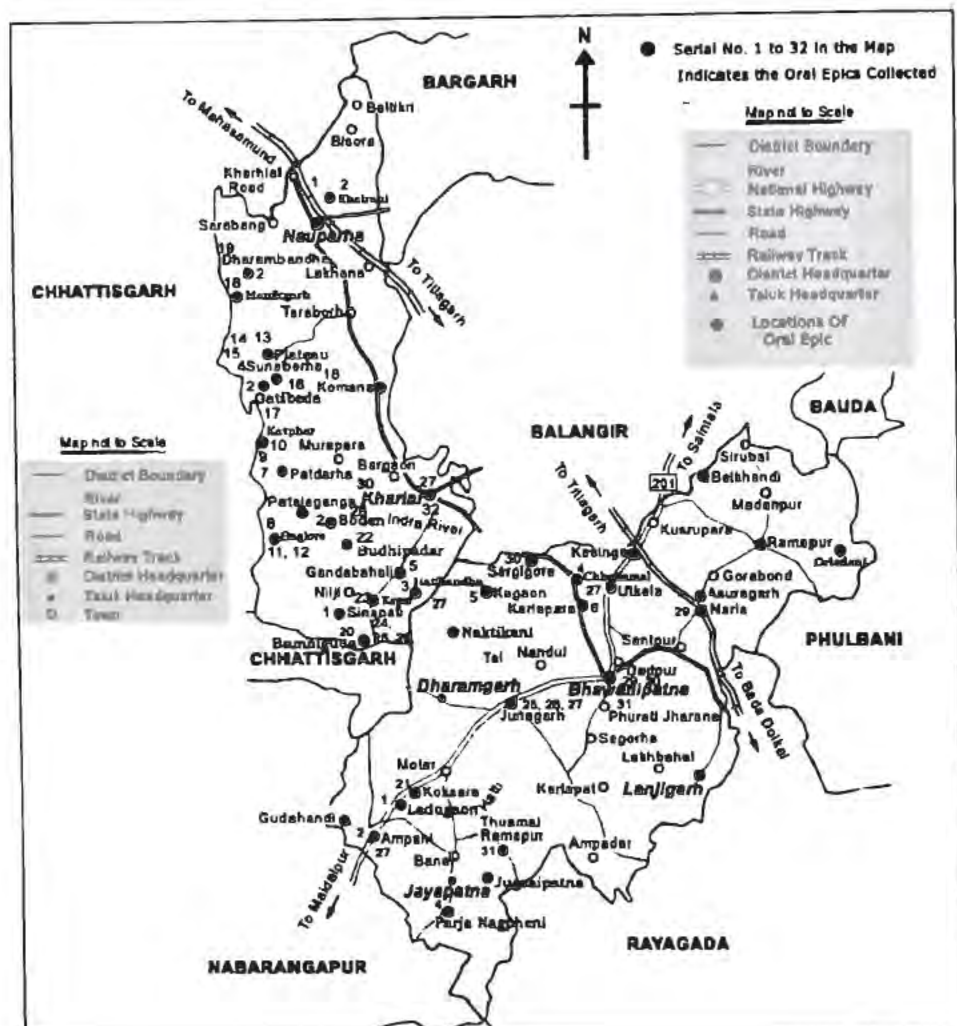
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District Map of Orissa
N
W
E
S
JHARKHAND
WEST BENGAL
CHHATTISGARH
ANDHRA PRADESH
Sundargarh
Jharsuguda
Mayurbhanj
Kendujhargarh
Deogarh
Bargarh
Sambalpur
Baleswar
Bhadrak
Sonapur
Angul
Dhenkanal
Jajpur
Nuaparha
Balangir
Bauda
Kendrapara
Cuttack
Phulbani
Nayagarh
Khorda
Jagatsinghpur
BHUBANESWAR
(State Capital)
Puri
Kalahandi
Nabar-
angapur
Rayagada
Ganjam
Gajapati
Koraput
Malkangiri
INDIA
Jamu &
Kashmir
Himachal Pradesh
PAKISTAN
CHINA
Punjab
Haryana
(TIBET)
NEPAL
Rajasthan
Uttar
Pradesh
Assam
Nagaland
Bihar
Megh-
alaya
Manipur
Gujarat
Madhya Pradesh
West
Bengal
Mizoram
MYANMAR
Orissa
Maharashtra
Andhra
Pradesh
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
Karnataka
Tamil Nadu
Kerala

Oral Epics of Kalahandi



Chapter 1

Introduction to Kalahandi

Kalahandi

Situated in the South-western part of Orissa and surrounded by hills, rivers, and valleys, Kalahandi has magnificent natural and cultural resources.

Before the merging of the princely states of Orissa with the union of India in 1948, Kalahandi was a princely state ruled by the Naga kings. In the ancient period, Kalahandi was a part of Mahakantara, Mahavana, South Koshala, and Trikalinga.

Kalahandi was popularly known as Karunda mandala during the medieval period. Royal dynasties such as the Parvata Dvaraka, the Nalas, the Saravapuriyas, the Somavamsi, and the Gangas ruled over Kalahandi. The Naga dynasty was the last one to rule over it, as known from the pages of history. (Singh Deo J.P., 1987:xxvii).[1]

Kalahandi through the Ages

The archaeological remains of Asurgarh fort in Narla Block of Kalahandi reveal the ancient trade relations of Kalahandi with Magadha, Kalinga, and Central India. The pre-Mauryan gold and copper coins found in Kalahandi signify its trade relation with Magadha in present Bihar.[2] (Schwartberg 1978:16) Kalahandi was famous for ivory and gemstones.

During the Gupta king Samudragupta's invasion of South India in fourth century A.D., he defeated king Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara (Kalahandi was known as Mahakantara at that time) and king Mahendra of South Koshala.[3] During the fourth to fifth century A.D., the Nala kings built two forts on the hills at Mahakantara Puskarigarh and Maradagarh. The Nala kings then ruled over this region. During the sixth century, local kings belonging to the Parvata Dvaraka dynasty ruled over the region and goddess Stambheswari (goddess worshipped in a stone pillar) was their clan deity.[4] Worship of the Pillar Goddess is very common till date among the tribal communities of Kalahandi.

The Saravapuriya dynasty ruled over Kalahandi during the seventh century. The Maraguda valley adjoining the Khariar region was under their control. Their capital was Sarabhapura. They were devotees of Lord Vishnu and goddess Lakshmi.[5] This indicates the influence of Hinduism in Kalahandi.

During the ninth to tenth century A.D., the Somavamsi Kings of South Koshala ruled over this region.[6]

In the eleventh century, the Chindaka Naga of Chakrakota Mandala (present Bastar region of Chhatishgarh state) ruled Kalahandi.[7] (Kuanr 1980:47). The Chindaka Naga established Goddess Manikeswari as their kingdom deity. Following Chindaka Naga the Gangas and then the Naga of Chhotanagpur ruled over Kalahandi[8] (*Ibid:* 50).

From the fourteenth century A.D. until independence, the Khariar region was under the Chauhan kings. They worshipped goddess Samaleswari and Raktambari as their kingdom deity and fort goddess, respectively.

Temples, archaeological remains, copper plates and gold coins, stone inscriptions, and stone sculptures of different ages are found in Kalahandi district. Cutting across time and space, these archaeological remains have significantly influenced the folk imagination reinterpreting and shaping the culture of the past to fit into their present. In many places, Buddha and Jaina images are worshipped by the local people as a village goddess Dokri Budhi. In folk imagination, Buddha has been turned into a female goddess. The inscriptions of Nala kings are also worshipped in the outskirts of the village as Akshara Devata.

The kings, queens, and the capital city were the dominant topics in the narrative texts. Thus, mythical, historical, and local ethnic cultures synchronized and the motifs of mythical thought and historical significance crept into folk imagination. Similarly, universal or historical characters have also been influenced by folklore.

The Naga Kings in Kalahandi

The Naga dynasty in Kalahandi, according to their court records, ruled over the state from 1040 A.D. The legend behind their establishment is that they were the descendants of the legendary hero Phanik Mukut Ray (son of the snake god Pundarika) of Chhotanagpur. The last Ganga ruler of Kalahandi, Raja Jagannath Dev, had no male heir. He got married Surekha, his only daughter, to Raghunath Sai, a prince of the Naga house of Chhotanagpur. On Raja Jagannath Dev's return from a long pilgrimage to northern India with his wife, the queen, they were denied entry into their own kingdom. Raghunath Sai usurped the throne of Kalahandi in 1005 A.D. He went on to rule Kalahandi for the next 35 years. Thirty chiefs of the Naga dynasty ruled Kalahandi following Raghunath Sai, till the independence of India, when Kalahandi merged with Orissa in 1948.

However, the Nagas' origin myth as described in Elliot's report in 1856 reveals the Naga rule in Kalahandi state and their association with the Kondhs of Kahalandi, which is significant from the perspective of history and oral epics.

According to Elliot, Kharonde (Kalahandi) was ruled by a family of Ganga-bunsee Rajputs – the last member of which was Juggernaut Deo (Jagannath Dev) who had no male heir to succeed him. He then sent for Rugnath Sai Deo (Raghunath Sai), the younger brother of the then king of Shatrunjigurh of Chhotanagpur, and gave his daughter in marriage to him, along with the rights to succession. In the words of Elliot,

> Rugnath Sai Deo, a Naga family Rajput was the first member of the present family, who has ever since held possession of the dependency. The present king Oodit Prasad Deo, the 28th in succession from him, succeeded his father in the year 1263 A.D., now about 21 years of age.

Elliot also goes further and mentions of a Kondh family near Joonagarh. Joonagarh, Elliot believes, is said to be a large town which was formerly the capital of the kingdom ('dependency' he calls it) but now is only jungle. The oldest member of the Kondh family, he says, was called Patmajee. When the king died, his funeral rites were performed and his corpse disposed of by the orders of his successor after the due completion of which officers, the Zamindars and principal persons in the kingdom assembled at Joogsai Patna for the purpose of crowning the young king. Elliot also provides a description of the crowning ceremony. The patmajee seats himself on a large rock and is dressed in rich clothes that are given to him specifically for the occasion.

> ...a rich cloth is thrown over his lap on which the young king sits while his turban while his turban is tied by the Baghe pater or Dewan – all the Zamindars and principal persons present holding the turban cloth. The Zamindars and others present their Nuzzurs in token of obedience... [this act] is attributed to a covenant said to have been entered into between some former king (name unknown) and the Khonds of the country, but unfortunately the legend has been lost: nor it appear that this particular Khond exercises any authority over his tribe.

The Durbar records of the Naga dynasty of Kalahandi reveal some culturally significant events during their 1000-year reign. The tract is known as Kondhan Desh; the British identified this land as Kondhistan.

Kalahandi was a land of indigenous tribes, particularly the Kondhs. It is found from Elliot's report that their number during 1856 A.D. was 80,000 out of the total 1,26,000 people in Kalahandi state.

The Kondhs were the local landowners who ruled the village. They were also the priests of their gods and goddesses.

The Kondhs had an affinity towards the Naga dynasty of Kalahandi. Although the Naga kings were the administrators of the kingdom, in reality, the Kondhs were using their community self-rule in socio-economic domains such as land use, forest, social and political organizations, and religious practices. The Kondhs were enjoying their village autonomy and religious freedom. The Jani (Kondh priest) is selected from the Kondh community only. The Kondhs maintained their village autonomy by exercising the power of their customary laws.

Chauhan Rule in Khariar

The ex-princely state of Khariar was ruled by the Chauhan dynasty. The history of the Chauhans in Khariar focuses on their culture hero Ramai Deo. In fourteenth century A.D., Ramai Deo established his Chauhan rule subduing the oligarchic rule in Patnagarh.

The present Chauhan of the Khariar state is a direct descendant of Ramai Deo, the culture hero of Western Orissa.[9]

Koshalananda Kavya, written by the court poet Sri Gangadhar Mishra of Sambalpur during the sixteenth century, is a Sanskrit literary epic on Ramai Deo and his descendants. This historical-literary epic focuses on the Chauhan rule in western Orissa, and Khariar was part of it.[10]

Similarly, *Jaya Chandrika* is an epic having the same Ramai Deo story line, written in Hindi by Prahlad Dubey ,the court poet of Saranagarh, called in the seventeenth century. Another small epic named *Ramai Deo* was written in Oriya by Sri Dibyakishore Sahu of Bolangir on the glory of the Chauhan kings of Patna. These three epics provide insights into the Chauhan rule in western Orissa. In all these epics, Ramai Deo is described as the culture hero of the Chauhans based on history and legend.[11]

With regard to the Chauhan settlement in Manikgarh, the historical accounts written by Cobden Ramsey is worthy of mention. The narrative of Ramai Deo that is found in the works of Ramsey is meaningful in terms of its commonality with many oral epics, tales, and legends of the Khariar region.

The present western Orissa was known as Patnagarh during fourteenth century A.D.. The territory was sub-divided into eight *garhs* administered by eight chieftains (*mallicks*). The garhs are Patnagarh, Kegaongarh, Salebhatagarh, Jarasinghgarh, Sindhekelagarh, Kholagarh, Gudagarh, and Komnagarh.[12] Of these eight *garhs*, the last three form the present Nuapada district (erstwhile Khariar state). On the Chauhan settlement in Khariar, British administrator-cum-orientalist Cobden Ramsey[13] comments:

> *It is said that Hamir Deva had fled from garh Shambhar and established himself at Manikgarh fort in the hills of Khariar. On one occasion before proceeding to battle he took leave of his seven wives and told them that should he not return they would be apprised of his death by the homeward flight of some carrier pigeons. He failed to return and was never afterwards heard of. The return of the pigeons satisfied the queens that he had fallen. Six of them drowned themselves in the pool called Ramdarah near Narsinghnath to the north of Patna State and the remaining queen was found wandering in the jungles near Ramud on the border between Patna and Khariar. She was kindly treated by her preserver, a Binjhal. In due course she delivered a child Ramai Deva who put an end to the Ath-maallick gadi by murdering the eight chiefs and himself assuming supremacy over the eight garhs (forts), which he wielded into the compact state of Patna and thus introduced the administration of Chauhan family.*

Interestingly, the story line of Ramai Deo is found in the oral and written narratives of many castes and tribes of western Orissa adjoining Chhatishgarh.

Meriah —Human Sacrifice in Kalahandi

The Kondhs practised *Meriah* or 'human sacrifice' for obvious reasons. First, they believed that human sacrifice was necessary to protect their community from the dangers of evil spirits. Second, the Kondhs practised human sacrifice to propitiate goddess *Dharnimata*. The purpose of such a sacrifice was to get sufficient rainfall and a rich harvest, luxurious growth of the forests, and safety from the attack of tigers, snakes, and unseen evil spirits.

This belief was so deeply ingrained in their minds that they would sacrifice their own sons and daughters when no *Meriah* was available from other villages. This continued till mid-nineteenth century, until the British officers Major Campbell and McPherson in Kalahandi suppressed it. On Kalahandi, Mr. Campbell was of the opinion that,

> *To this Raja Futty Narain Deo great credit is due for his earnest and effectual efforts for the suppression of human sacrifice in the hill Zamindaries renders his authority.*[14]

Thus, suppression of human sacrifice and transfer of landownership were two major issues that compelled the Kondhs to revolt against the king. The suppression of human sacrifice was a great cultural loss to the religious beliefs of the Kondhs. Earlier the king was helping them in human sacrifice, but when the kings joined the British in suppressing it, the Kondhs fought against the kings and the British. Lt McNeill arrested Rendo Majhi, an *Umrah* (village headman), in 1853 for practising *Meriah.* On 10 December 1855, Lt McNeill arrested him and chained his legs and hands as a warning to other Kondhs. The Kondhs could not tolerate such a humiliation of their chief and therefore attacked the British camp. This rebellion was suppressed and Rendo Majhi was hanged.[15]

In 1853, the king invited the Kultas (advanced-cultivators) from Sambalpur to Kalahandi to improve the cultivation process and increase revenue in the State. During that period, many Kondh *Umrahs* could not pay the annual revenue to the king and so they were removed from power. The Kultas managed to pay the revenue for landownership. Thus the village administration was transferred from the Kondhs to the Kultas. It was a great blow to the Kondhs as it meant loss of their economy and social status. They were suppressed by the kings, British, and the settled cultivators, and between 1835 and 1882, many Kondhs had to either leave their village or surrender to the power. Therefore, they withdrew into the forest in search of a new settlement.

In 1882, the Kondhs again protested against the king's policy of land transfer from them to the non-tribals. The Kondhs were the native landowners of Kalahandi from time immemorial. But the king under the British rule wanted to generate more revenue by shifting land ownership to upper-caste cultivators. The Kondhs were exploited by the cultivators (community) as well as other upper castes, because a major cultivable plain land was transferred to them from the Kondhs which led to a conflict between them. The Kondhs took revenge on the Kultas and in 1882-1883 A.D. they rebelled against the king. But the British helped the king again and suppressed the rebellion.[16] (Deo, F 1990:182-186). The battle between the Kondhs and Kulta is narrated in the *Kondhmeli* song.

Until 1922, the land settlement was not taken up in Kalahandi. In 1934, the Maharaja abolished forced labour (before it the *bethi* and *beggar* were prevalent). In 1926, the British conferred the 'Maharaja' title on the king of Kalahandi.

Except some local events, no significant characters or events of Kalahandi influenced the history of Orissa or the history of India. The impenetrable forests and hills, and the conventional forest life of the Kondhs of Kalahandi were left with no place in the greater history of India, except for its local significance.

However, human sacrifice by the Kondhs during the mid-nineteenth century and female infanticide by the Kondhs Paraja, the traditional cultural life of the tribals, were the identity of Kalahandi. On the contrary, the king and Brahmins were predominant in power and knowledge, respectively; the Kultas in agriculture and the Punjabis, Marwaris, Sindhis, and Sundhis in controlling the forest economy and agricultural economy of the cultivators which formed the socio-economic and cultural foundation of the district.

Kalahandi was a princely state in which the impact of the Indian freedom movement was negligible. Barring some educated people of the upper-castes, the people of Kalahandi were ignorant of the freedom movement. Most of the people were of the idea that the British would once again leave Kalahandi to the Naga kings. However, the Kayastha and Brahmins who centred around the kings determined the fate of Kalahandi.

Out of the 18 small kingdoms that paid tributes to the Maharaja of Kalahandi, Kashipur Raja supported the freedom movement in his zamindary and from 1939 to 1946 continued the freedom movement in his region with his fellow men Jhajur Jodia and Ramachandra Nayak. The King of Kalahandi had jailed Ramachandra Nayak and Jhajur Jodia in Bhawanipatna (the capital city of Kalahandi) till 1946 and after independence they were set free.[17]

Social Context of Kalahandi

The socio-economic life of Kalahandi is regulated by two aspects: the food gathering people who depend the forest products, and the agrarian society. The total population of undivided Kalahandi and their percentage of literacy are mentioned below:

District	Persons	Males	Females	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
Nuapada	5,30,524	2,64,490	2,66,034	42.29	58.78	26.01
Kalahandi	13,34,372	6,67,126	6,67,246	46.02	62.88	29.56

(Source: As per Census of India 2001: Orissa)

Approximately 70 per cent of the people depend on agriculture, while 25 per cent depend on the forests to earn their livelihood; the rest live in urban areas. Scheduled tribes form 30 per cent of the population in the district and the scheduled castes 15 per cent. More than 48 per cent of the men and 70 per cent of the women are nonliterate. Female literacy rate among the tribals in some parts of the district is below 10 per cent.

As a traditional society, Kalahandi presents the greater agricultural society followed by the rapidly vanishing forest culture. The urban settlement is the reference group for controlling the forest economy and the agricultural products. Concentration of power, wealth, and knowledge is found in urban centres as well as among the higher castes. The influence of the traditional *Gauntia* (village administrative head exercising wealth and power) system was prevalent even after independence. In most of the traditional villages of Kalahandi, the Kultas (cultivators), Gaurs (milkman), and Brahmins were

the landowners. People who own no land to earn their livelihood from are still called *sukhbasi.*[18] There is a proverb *Gai nai Goru, Sukhe nind Karu*, which means 'a man having no cattle or cow can sleep happily.' The irony of unequal distribution of land and resources, and perpetual social disparities is satirically reflected in this proverb. Apart from gender and caste discrimination, lack of awareness among the people, belief in fate than in *Karma*, expecting miraculous solutions for any problem are some of the characteristics of the people of Kalahandi. When rainwater is scarce, people invoke Bhima, the rain god for rain. For a rich harvest, the tribal perform *Meriah* in their field. Both the forest and the agriculture have given the people of Kalahandi a naturalistic worldview across time and space. This has been helpful for the people in power to subdue the majority in the socio-economic domain. Even the cultural practices, which represent the philosophy of equality, are advantageous for the people who want to exploit them. Therefore to maintain 'truth', many tribes have lost their land. Many families have ruined their ancestral land and history and became beggars because of their addiction to liquor. The result is migration.

The co-existence of such castes and tribes in the district sharing the social practices and culture is found in the land of discrimination created by the people where majority live in culture of silence and very few people form the domain of authority.

The people and their occupation form an integral part of a land in shaping the culture. The Brahmins, Bhulia, Bairagi, Dosi, Gaur (Magdha, Oriya, Laria) Karan, Kshyatiya (Naga, Chauhan), Kulta (cultivators), Kurmi, Mali (gardener), Paik Sapua, Sumani, and Sundhi (liquor vendor) belong to the general and other backward castes.

The scheduled tribes in the district form the ethnic culture from time immemorial. The Kandhs, Gonda, Sabers, Bhunjias, Binjhali, Banjaras, Dals, Parajas, Bhatras, Saora, the Munda, and Mirdhas are the major scheduled tribes in the district. Most of them belong to the Dravidian language group, though all the tribal people speak native Oriya.

The scheduled castes have served and contributed to the society despite their prolonged suppression. They are the social musicians too. The most interesting point here is that though they were untouchables, their role in invoking the gods and goddesses was very vital.

The caste/tribe's status in Kalahandi was stratified. The Brahmins were the most powerful caste, although very small in number, and enjoyed enormous power during the kingship. They were the advisors to the king and the religious teachers also. The Ksatriyas were the rulers. Kayastha or Karan were the accountants and record keepers of the king and were very close to the king in helping administration. Next came the businessmen. Then came the tribals in the status ladder. They were the land owners. They were also known as the Raja clan like Raj Gonds.

The web of cultural affiliation of the castes and tribes in traditional Kalahandi may be viewed as shown in the following table.

Castes	Status	Symbol	Place	Occupation
	Brahman	Knowledge near power, *Rajguru*	Royal palace of Raja and Zamindar, semi-urban village	Religious teaching, land ownership, village headman, literature, worship, advisor to the kings, *Gauntias*, diplomacy.
	Ksatriyas	Power, Raja, Zamindar	Urban caste	Administration, land rule, revenue, forest, warfare
	Kayastha	Knowledge	Urban, Semi-urban	Accountants, Administration, Education, Advisor to the king, diplomacy
	Cultivators (Gaur and other cultivator castes)	Wealth	Village	Farming, Horticulture
	Businessmen	Property, Agriculture	Urban and rural	Village administration, *Gauntia*, controlling the rural economy
Scheduled Tribes	Gonds, Kandhas, Saber, Bhunjia, Parja	Land owner and village self-rule	Jungle, villages	Forest products, Agriculture, worship/forest hood for clan deity, entertainment
Occupation Groups	Gaur, Teli, Mali, Keut, Kumbhar, Dhoba	Service	Rural	Cattle breeding and all occupational work
Scheduled Castes	Dom, Ghasi, Chamar	Untouchable, service	Rural urban forest	Music, *chowkidar*, rural business, mediators

The following proverbs are regarding the caste-based occupation and all the castes taking land as a unit of culture area in Kalahandi. Their service to the village *Gudi*, worship place, is indicated in the proverbs. The proverbs also signify the symbol of the caste occupation. The proverbs are:

Gondarje Bhuin—Gond owns the land.

Rajarje Raij—Raja rules over the kingdom.

Bamnekar Paita—The sacred thread is of the Brahmin.

Domekar Salta—The wick for the lamp is of the Dom.

Bhunjikar Debta—The God/Goddess are of the Bhunjia.

Telikar Ghani—The oil press is of the Teli.

Gourekar Pani—Water supply by the Gaur.

Keutarji Jal—The net is of the fisher folk.

Lohararje Sal—The blacksmith owns the workshop (for iron).

Liaharar Ghana—The pot for parching rice is of the parched rice seller.

Bhuliekar Tana—The weaving machine is of the bhulias (weavers).

The above proverbs signify the importance and distribution of the caste-based occupation in a village in Kalahandi.

When the Gonds and the Kondhs (or any tribal chief in the village) were the landowners exercising the village self-rule, the king was only ruling over them. Before the British rule, the influence of the king's administration hardly affected the villagers. The occupation groups were the majority and were the link between the rural, tribal, and urban population in terms of providing to each people what they required from the other people. Gradually, the caste based occupation groups also achieved the status of village headman (*Gauntia*), paying revenue to the kings. Tribal headmen were unable to pay the revenue and gradually lost their village administrative power.

The Bhunjia are the primitive tribes of Kalahandi. They are still strong believers of gods and goddesses. During the Chauhan rule, they were the priests of goddesses Duarsani and Sunadi, Rupadi, Indradi and Sindradi. Next to them the Paharia-Kamars, a primitive tribe very small in number (about 3,000) in Sunabeda plateau of Nuapada district, are significant in terms of maintaining their hunter and food-gatherer character.

The Gaurs are the major caste with settled agriculture as their occupation and cattle as property. They form the greater farmer community of Kalahandi, and have strong caste solidarity. They are the Magadha, Laria, and Oriya depending on where they hail from.

The milkman (Gaur) supplies water to the goddess and to all higher-caste people and the oil-maker caste owns the oil press. The fisher folk are identified with their net and the blacksmith is known for his workshop where he makes iron implements.

Banjara was a nomadic tribe of kings in the past and came from Madhya Pradesh to settle down in Kalahandi adjoining Chhatishgarh as a community of salt traders. They speak a dialect of Hindi mixed with Rajasthani.

Thus, all the castes and tribes coexist in the villages of Kalahandi. When the tribal people attend the Hindu fairs and festivals, the cultivator Brahmins of rural Kalahandi sacrifice a cock/hen or a sheep in their agriculture field in the name of earth goddess to get rich harvest. However, there is mutual sharing of culture in rural Kalahandi where villagers form a large family. A young Brahmin boy calls an older untouchable as 'uncle', and the older Brahmin women are also equally addressed as sister-in-law or aunt by an untouchable man.

Sharing of culture between the castes and tribes on a common platform, and celebration of clan rites and rituals represent the *kulachar*, *lokachar*, and *deshachar*. The foundation of the culture and formation of a commonality of cultural traits have been possible through sharing of life.

Different castes and tribes have mingled in this land amidst their struggle and survival with the strong bond of love and war, conflicts between ethnic groups, and resolution. The story of a forest life and an agricultural society is shaped in the culture where each ethnic group has tried to establish its own cultural identity by expressing the collective creation of their own occupation on one hand and associating with the universal Indian culture on the other.

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2

Methodology

Goals

The aim of this study is to collect and document the oral epics of select ethnic groups of Kalahandi. Oral tradition is a means of communication and recreation and also a means of cultural transmission, which helps the community carry forward the collective creativity through its singers. Recently when a study of folklore in Kalahandi was conducted, it was found that many people were aware that the songs, tales and the narratives were important to scholars. Gradually, many tribal organizations have grown interested in learning their heritage through such oral epics and myths.

To date, very few efforts have been made by the local scholars to collect and document oral traditions. The purpose of the study is to collect such oral epics that are vanishing from the community, and to understand the collective memory of the singers. It is also important to mention that beyond the boundaries of the academic domain, the oral epics and myths are also necessary for the tribals' regeneration in the social and domestic domain. Thus, the study of oral epics has a broad goal in contributing to the oral discourse of Folklore as well as reiterating the importance of oral epics in the community's social functions.

Oral Epic: Problems of Definition

Oral epic is a genre of folklore, which was an important subject of study during the nineteenth century in Europe. Nowadays, many countries are in search of their cultural roots through analyses of their oral epics and myths. Felix J. Oinas, a noted scholar in Oral Epic says,

> folk or oral epic songs are ornamental style dealing with the adventures of extraordinary people.[1]

From the point of view of Indian poetics, epics are divided into two types: *Itihasa* and *Purana*. Defining the traditional narratives of India in which epic is a major genre, Mishra comments that traditional narratives aim at

1. Looking at life as a set of correspondences in both content and form and thus visualizing the totality of life;

2. Reintegrating parts into a whole through a unified mental, vocal, and physical endeavour;
3. Resolving human problems not on an individual level but on the level of a whole community's effort and perseverance, and sharing the anguish of great creative minds for a fuller and more meaningful living; and
4. Involving one self and getting entrapped in the mesh of human desires and aspirations out of sheer curiosity and seeking release by capturing the minds of the new generations into this network of human relationship.[2] (Mishra:107).

Differentiating the characteristics of western epics from that of the oral epics of Africa, Belcher says,

> the term epic refers to an extended narrative on a historical topic, delivered in public performance, most often with musical accompaniment, by a specialized performer.[3]

On Indian Epic and Myth, Ramanujan is of opinion that epics in India are characteristically different from the puranas and myths.[4] While myths and puranas have a ritual context, epics have a social context. Other than that, the differentiation made by Ramanujan, according to the principles mentioned in his work, shows a thin boundary between myth and epics.

In order to understand the nomenclature of oral epics in Kalahandi, it may be noted that the oral narrative poetry which is characteristically similar to historic poetry (*Itihasa*) or the narrative poetry of different caste groups, which is assigned to a musical instrument or sung in a particular religious or social occasion, may be termed as an oral epic. Oral epic is available as a genre of oral tradition in non-literate societies. The relevance of such a rare genre in a traditional society is its function; they carry the cultural symbols and meanings of a given society.

Oral epic singing and performance was a part of the rich culture in the folklore of Kalahandi. But with the growth of modern education, traditional singing is gradually disappearing. The singers' clan masters are not showing interest in safeguarding their own history anymore. The professional singers are gradually giving up their singing profession and adopting agriculture and other occupations to earn their livelihood. But previously, they depended completely on their singing profession. Thus, oral epic is a rare genre of folklore in Kalahandi which is confined to the professionals only. It is also evident that the older people in the villages are rich repositories of oral narratives.

As oral epics, myths, and caste genealogies are associated with rites and rituals, and gods and goddesses, the songs are esoteric in nature. The senior priests, singers, and bards inherit this knowledge from their ancestors. Myths and epics are confined to the senior male priests. Female priests are the borrowers of caste myths and ritual myths. The new generation is not interested in knowing or using this esoteric knowledge and therefore, it is a threat to the maintenance and inheritance of caste knowledge.

Objective

The objective of this study is to collect the oral epics from the professional singers. This includes

- Learning the purpose and meaning of singing the narrative songs in their socio-cultural context.
- Studying the ethnography of the professional singers.
- Studying the performance context and the content of oral epics, and discovering the process of singing oral epics.
- Studying how oral epics form the centre of ethic identity and group solidarity.
- Knowing the performer-audience relationship and the participation of the audience in sharing the knowledge.
- Examining how the people perceive folk epics as the source of their *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*, and how the classical tradition of Indian epics has been reinterpreted in local imagination. On the other hand, it is also to learn how the local tradition has been woven into the fabric of classical tradition.

The stories of heroic deeds, myths, and caste genealogies sung by the caste-specific professional singers are popularly known as *Geet* (song). In oral literature, this *geet* is sometimes as small as two lines and sometimes more than a thousand lines also. The *pandavani geet*, *dewar geet*, *bans geet* and *bhima sidi geet*, and the narrative poetry are also known as *geet*. In Chhatishgarh, the *pandwani geet* sung by a female singer is also called *geet;* it is as though the whole *Mahabharata* is a purana which has been narrated with local imagination in their cultural context.

Felix J. Oinas, Milman Parry, Albert B. Lord, Otto Rank, Lauri Honko, John Brockington, Isidore Okpewho, John Miles Foley, Stephen Belcher, and many other scholars of western countries have studied the oral epic tradition and tried to define the characteristics of this genre. These scholars discussed the content, form, stylistics, and texture and tried to textualize it. Oral epics emerged to become a fascinating genre of Folklore research. Over the past 30 years, Folklore fellows of Oral Epics around the world have been able to establish a new dimension to the study of epic traditions and this has created a discipline in the study of oral epics both in the East and the West. This helped in understanding the web of cultural interactions in many living cultures across the world.

> A special feature of the epic scene in India is the abundance of living oral epics. Not only are classical Sanskrit epics still very much alive in both oral and written performances, they also interact with a multitude of local epic formations with or without affinity of plots, poetic means, mode of performance or performative style. India is a place where scholarly discoveries can be made and practically unknown epics of longer or shorter format document in oral composition and performance.[5] (Honko: 1999: 44-45).

> If the epic is a myth, its performance is ritual. The basic story remains untold as a liner narrative but function as a mental backdrop filling the minds of the participants. What is said and song, however, is more representative of the situation than the long epic as a story.[6] (*Ibid*: 44-45).

In the Indian context, the study of *Siri* epic, *Paddana* (Tulunad), *Sayon Ori* (Manipuri), *Kathe* (Andhra Pradesh), *Geet* (Hindi, Bhojpuri, eastern India, Orissa) and so on are acclaimed as oral narrative poetry, which is termed as Oral Epics by the western and Indian scholars of Folkloristics.

Nomenclature

On the basis of the epic songs performed by the singers, the names of these songs are *Geet*, *Katha*, *Khena*, *Gova*, *Sidi*, and *Khayat*, which are sung narratives. But at times, the narratives are found interspersed with prose-verse and poetry accompanied by music having a different purpose and meaning in a given context. The songs that tell stories are called *katha*.

Geet

In Kalahandi, all the songs are called *geet* irrespective of their length; two-lined and thousand lined songs are known as *geet*. The songs of dance, of rites of passage, of prayer/eulogy to gods and goddesses, for music and dance, for weeping, songs with epic narrative characters, to invoke the spirits of ancestor spirits, and lullabies are all termed *geet*. It is the performance context, the purpose, and the meaning which determine the genre of a song.

Katha

Although Katha means tale and it is a prose narrative, it refers to the singer singing the heroic songs. The term the singer uses for the epic song is also known as *Katha* as in *Nangmati Rajaphulia Katha* or *Manduka Majhi katha*. It is found that the genre changes with the same content in a different context. This means that when the same text is narrated in prose form it is *katha* and when sung accompanied by musical instruments it becomes *geet*. But in *Katha*, poems, prose, and dialogue are interspersed in the performance.

Khena

Khena means 'branch of a tree'. It is locally said that if the whole epic cycle is a tree, each unit of the epic is a *khena*. It may also be noted that the word *khena* might have been derived from *akhayana*, a Sanskrit word for narrative. The Gaur or Gaura *bansgeet* is popularly known as *barakhena bansgeet* (12 branches of the epic song).

Another theory on the origin of the word *khena* is that it could have been derived from *skandha* or *khanda*, which means 'part of the whole epic cycle'. *Srimad Bhagavata*, the sacred text written in Oriya consists of 12 *skandha*, which might have led the Gaur epic singers to imagine 12 cultural epic heroes, and therefore, the *khena* might be the derivative of the Sanskrit word Skandha. Kondh epic singers also identify their epic

songs as *khena*. They divide the *Bhima Sidi* into two parts: the *janam khena* and the *nangar khena*. However, in folk language, the *skandha* or *khand* is distorted and pronounced as *khena*, *khand*, and *khan*.

Sidi

Sidi means 'chanting of mantra'. The songs that come down from the spiritual world to the earth through the golden and silver strings are called *sidi*. The gods and goddesses descend to the earth only through the songs, and the priest-singer is the mediator between the spiritual and the mortal world.

Purja

The songs of the Gonds assigned to caste genealogies are known as *Purja*. *Purjas* have a little in poetry form, a small addition of prose, and are filled with ethnic proverbs. Narrative stories such as *Chital Singh Chhatri* and *Hirakhan Chhatri*, characteristically have the bards singing their heroic deeds while being accompanied by the *kikri*.

Khayat

The Banjara epic song is known as *Khayat*. The performers play the *daphli*, a one-sided drum, while singing.

Puran

Puran means myth. The Debgunia, a singer community, sings the *Puran* in a local dialect of Oriya. The content is based on the origin of paddy cultivation. This is also known as *khand* (part) among which one is *Lakshmi Janam* (birth of Lakshmi) and another is *karam khand* (work-cultivation). They play the Brahmaveena, a local harp while singing the *purans*.

Review of Literature

The written resources on the study of oral epics in Kalahandi are limited in view of their scholarship. It is found that the literary tradition which was in the form of written tradition among the court poets is sometimes sung/performed orally by the people of Kalahandi. Both written and oral traditions are available in the society. For instance, in the annals of the Chauhans' origin and settlement in the Khariar region, the caste genealogies of the Naga rulers of Kalahandi are found in written form in Sanskrit and Oriya, respectively, and the storyline of their royal lineage is also found, with local variations, in the folklore of many castes and tribes of the region. Some of them may be very important in terms of comparing the written with the oral narratives, and also in reconstructing the missing links in history.

Sri Gangadhar Mishra, a court poet of Sambalpur, wrote *Koshalananda Kavya* in Sanskrit (Mishra: 2000). The epic is about the Chauhan hero Ramai Deo. Ramai Deo is a legendary hero of the fourteenth century who established the Chauhan rule in western Orissa. Interestingly, British administrators, ethnographers, historians, litterateurs,

and the folk singers enumerate the same account of Ramai Deo which is available in the Sanskrit epic. Similarly, *Jaya Chandrika* written by Prahalad Dubey, a court poet of Sarangarh, is also based on the Chauhan origin, which is equally popular in oral tradition[8] (Singh Deo, 1986).

Raja Padman Singh of Thuamul-Rampur of Kalahandi wrote *Nagavansa Charita*[9], which is about the Naga origin in the Chhotanagpur region and the migration of the descendants of Phanik Mukut Ray, the first progenitor of the Nagas, to the kingdom of Kalahandi[10] (Sinha: 1962).

The origins of the Nagas and the Chauhans in Kalahandi and Khariar regions, respectively, reveal that the court poets and kings have written their genealogies in an epic-form. But the availability of the same story, both in oral and written form, questions the origin of the narratives and leads to a debate on whether the tribals borrowed the myths from the royal tradition or whether the royal tradition validates the tribal myths. However, it is clear that even in the non-literate societies of the country, the oral-written-oral cycle of cultural transmission is quite common.

Before the use of paper (nearly till the first part of the twentieth century), palm leaf manuscripts and *Bhurja patra* were used to write documents. The palm leaf manuscripts were used to codify the *puranas* and *kavyas*, and were carefully preserved. The kings and nobles also patronized it. The Brahmins (priests), *joshis* and debgunias (singers of Goddess Lakshmi) sold the palm leaf manuscripts for alms and money. The Gond genealogy *Purja* was also found in the written form. After paper came into use, drought song, *hatidhara* song (capture of elephant) and *Kondhmeli* song (song of Kondh rebellion) were found to be written by the folk poets. The oral singers recited these on par with the written composers. Thus, the cycle of oral-written-oral is found in Kalahandi.

The oral epics *(geet)* of Kalahandi have the following characteristics:

- The *geet* is sung by professional singers, who belong to some caste/sub-caste/tribe.
- The singers earned their livelihood by singing as their family profession.
- The ethnography of the singers reveals the uniqueness of their bardic tradition.
- They perform the geet during the rites of passage and also on some social occasions.
- The content of the songs are related to the origin of caste, the first progenitor, cultural heroes, and gods and goddesses, thus cutting across the terms myth, legend, and tale.
- Each song is sung by one or more singers with one or more persons accompanying them on musical instruments.
- The relationship between the performer and the audience is reciprocal, thus showing ethnic solidarity.
- The songs–*geet*–are based on ethnic solidarity and sing the glory of a caste.

- The epic songs and myths are subject to correction by the audience, if the singer misleads the audience in content.
- Although myths have their ritual significance, the character and events of myths are reinterpreted in the epics.
- Caste genealogies bear the mythical symbols, and epics are the simplification of myths and caste genealogies.
- Musical instruments are the symbol of gods.

Epics – Oral and Written

The existence of such oral epic songs in different castes and tribes has been reflected in the literary works of novelist Sri Parasuram Mund of Kashibahal village of Kalahandi between 1945 and 1950.[11] In the middle of the twentieth century, he had an opportunity to listen to the long epic story of Chait Singh and Patrani (the marriage of a Kondh girl to the prince of Kalahandi). Unfortunately, the epic songs which I witnessed are available no more.

Sri Manohar Meher was a folk poet who wrote on the drought in Kalahandi. His *Marudi geet* pictures the drought of 1899 (*Chhapan salar durbhiksya*) and 1966.

Hatidhara geet (capturing the elephants), a song of about 500 lines written by poet Maghaban Mallick is another song that bears the memories of the capturing of elephants in the jungles of Bolangir and Kalahandi. The techniques used in capturing wild elephants using traditional methods and the cooperation of the whole community in the mission are narrated here. Mallick wrote this song in the 1930s, and surprisingly the song is available orally among the senior singers even now.

Kondhmeli geet is another historical narrative song that describes the Kondh rebellion of 1882 against the Kulta cultivators. In the state of Kalahandi, Raja Udit Pratap Deo and his descendant Fateh Narayan Deo invited the Kulta, an agricultural class, from Sambalpur to Kalahandi to develop and improve agriculture and revenue. This led to the displacement of the Kondhs, which resulted in a rebellion. The description of the massacre of the Kulta by the Kondhs and the suppression of the rebellion by the British is described in this song. This was written by the poet Sri Kamal Charan Kampal Suna. Another version of this song is available in written form.

Poet Kandarpa Panda of Sagunbhadi village in Sinapali block wrote, between 1930 and 1940, a mythical song on the origin of *Ghumura* dance. The song is a detailed description of the origin of *Ghumura*, origin of the instruments, and its relation to the war dance of goddess Durga.

Hypotheses

- Oral epics bear the glorious history and heritage of different ethnic groups.
- The caste genealogies, the creation myth, and the epics of the different ethnic groups bear the ethnic identity that contributes to group solidarity.

- There is an inter-textuality among the myths, legends, epics, and caste genealogies. It means that the same story is found in the myths, legends, and epics in different socio-cultural contexts.
- There are common elements/motifs in folk epics, which are found among the oral expressions of all the castes/tribes, which indicate that the folklore is identical irrespective of ethnic distinction in customs.
- Many castes and tribes in their cultural context have reinterpreted the Sanskrit and Oriya *puranas*, suitably placing the episodes in their ethnic context.
- The oral epics have their socio-religious and cultural functions in the society, which helps in retaining the social identity of the castes/tribes.
- Function of oral epics is important in terms of maintaining social control and social rules that represent cultural values.

Methodology

Problem of Documentation

Collection of epics in oral form needs special care. Oral epics are found among the people of specific age groups in some caste/tribal groups. Myths and caste genealogies are sacred and therefore esoteric. It is very difficult to collect the esoteric myths and songs from those bards who will not perform the myths outside of their original context. There are some festivals which take place in the community once in three or twelve years, or every three years. The occasion to participate in certain rituals and festivals appears in different spaces and times. For instance, it is very difficult to ascertain when a clan bard (Parghania) will appear at his patron's house and when he will leave for another patron's house. In fact, the actual performance context to witness a recitation of a *Purja* is only when a Parghania is found in his clan master's house in a clan's ritual performance.

The rituals and festivals such as buffalo sacrifice, a modified form of the *Meriah,* is performed once in 12 years in a Kondh village. In 1989, the Kondhs of Hatibandha village instituted *pod puja* (buffalo sacrifice) and it took about seven days to observe the main festival that was preceded by a one-month-long ritual. The Gova Jani, main priest singer, sings *Janam Khena Puran* (creation myth) at 9.00 p.m. with his assistants. At every interval of a sub-theme, they drink liquor from a copper pipe. They use a *sadki.* As the *pod puja* is performed only once in 12 years, the occasion is very important in observing the ritual performances and recitation of myths.

The *toki parab* takes place in the Paraja village of Kalahandi. It is performed very rarely. The priests-cum-myth-singers of the ethnic groups are the important persons from whom the myths/epics could be collected.

The epics based on cultural heroes, war, love, and expeditions sung by the epic singers need no ritual context, except invoking the clan gods and goddesses while commencing the singing. The singer also worships the musical instruments before and after the performance.

The opportunities for collection of data, especially those in ritualistic performance context, are most important. But when the singers are asked to sing the songs/epics/myths/tales, they agree to sing only those songs that are not associated with any festival or ritual. Even for these performances, the community makes some arrangements on the researcher's request and the performance takes place for audio or video documentation. However, although the singers feel comfortable singing in front of a tape recorder, they sometimes hesitate to face the video camera.

The method for collection of data requires attention to be paid to the singer's attitude and acceptance. While documenting the oral myths of the Paharia tribe of Katpar village, such an event disturbed the whole purpose. After recording for seven hours at night, the recordings were played to the singers the next morning; they were terribly disturbed on how a small machine could take away their voice. The next moment they refused to sing the song. Even the villagers decided to not sing for any outsiders who could capture their voice. (Who knows, with another machine he may capture the life!) There was no choice but to accept their decision.

Similar problems were encountered while documenting the long myth of Bhima's marriage from the Gurumai (aged female priestess). When they were asked to sing the mythical epic *Bhima Biha* (marriage of Bhima), they reacted saying, 'who would dare to wake up the gods and goddess when they are all asleep?' They meant that the prescribed time for singing the ritual-myth had not come and that, the time was for the gods to sleep.

Another problem faced during the collection of epics was language. Tribal languages such as Kondh, Bhunjia, Kamar, Banjara, and Gondi (in case of caste genealogies) required translation from the informant or from the semi-literate people. It is told that the language used in everyday life is different from that used in the myths. The symbols, similes, and metaphors used in the myths are esoteric, tradition-bound words that bear the ritual values. The symbols also differ from one caste to another. This is because the perception of a caste group towards a character or an object determines the name of the symbol. For instance, if a Kamar sees a tiger in the forest he will express it casually: like he saw a dog while he was coming home. An outsider may not be able to understand the meaning of it. Similarly, the priests say that the goddess demands a 'sixteen-horned sheep' which is actually a cock. It is necessary to know how and why the cock is imagined to be a 'sixteen-horned sheep'. Similarly, the two-lined songs of the buffalo-sacrifice myth are widely used as proverbs among the Kondhs. Unless the context and meaning is understood from the elderly Kondhs or the priests, it is very difficult to understand the overall meaning. Thus, the surface language created in the mental texts of the singer have deeper meanings. Only the seniors know the highly contextualized cultural meaning of such phrases, proverbs, and sayings. The caste genealogies collected from the Gond bard is still a mysterious *mantra* which is only partially understood because most of the sentences are not connected to each other. Each sentence represents an event. It is found that between two sentences some event is unspoken, but when discussed orally, the missing link is revealed. The symbols of two sentences have to be understood and

the chronology of the events must be arranged to arrive at the meaning. But this has to be validated by the senior people of the community.

Collection or documentation of epics or mythical songs depends upon the type of people we choose to document from. Some bards earn their livelihood by singing the caste genealogies/epic songs in their clan master's house; they do not have adequate knowledge of their clan master's lineage. In such cases, they sing the distorted caste genealogies or epic songs. Therefore, whatever is collected from the caste bards cannot be considered authentic, unless they are validated by examining the variations of the same text. It is also found that some village headmen are good at restoring the narratives from the singers and preserving them for posterity. This may be to maintain records of their clan history, which they might have learnt from the Zamindars and local kings. During the field work, a village landlord helped me in acquiring some caste genealogies. They were written in a notebook, but the language was Laria in some cases and spoken Gondi in others.

Reluctance to sing was another problem. Even when the bard is assured some money, he hesitates to share the esoteric knowledge. Once, a Parghania was asked to hold his *Kikri* up in his left hand for a photograph. He agreed, but would not remove the *Kikri* from the cloth that he had wrapped it in. The Ghogia (Gaur bard) and Parghania (Gond bard) refused to share their knowledge. One of them passed away and now his nephew has inherited and adopted the profession.

Transmission

Inheritance of knowledge or handing down of knowledge is permissible only among the family or the kin group. For instance, the singer can desire his son, brother's son, or brother to learn the myths, epics, and caste genealogies. But sometimes, it is found that when the son fails or is unwilling to inherit the singing profession, the sons-in-law or the nephew of the singer inherit the profession by accompanying him in singing.

This is because they want to keep the professional occupation confined to themselves. When a priest was asked why the Kondhs were practising *Meriah*, he retorted, 'Are you my son?' The meaning was clear; somebody not belonging to his clan or kin was not supposed to know the reason.

The nomadic nature of the professional singers and their temporal availability - as they visit their clan master's house and also because they have adopted agriculture in their homeland - does not allow the scholars to follow him easily. It is very important to find a singer in his home. When they are at home during the rainy season, they do not like to open the *Kikri Vana* (fiddle), because they feel that is not the right time to open it. They say, 'when god is sleeping how can his instrument be awakened?' Therefore, the purpose of interviewing a singer in his home is, sometimes, not achieved. The two places with different contexts determine their nature of performances.

The engagement of priests/professional singers and clan bards in different occupations to earn their livelihood is another reason affecting their creativity. Their

economic status is degenerating with the change in times as they are tradition-bound ethnic singers. As they are faithful to their profession, they have not abandoned their *Kul Vana* (clan symbol) and are still obliged to their clan masters. The social change: emergence of school education and the electronic media, have changed the tastes of the tribal people. So the caste bards find it difficult to retain their ethnic occupation. They are in a state of confusion whether to keep it or give it up. This emotional conflict arising out of confusion is reflected in their behaviour. While they adopt a new occupation for their livelihood, they are flexible. But when they are asked about their myths and songs they hesitate to share.

Rigidity in changing occupations, secrecy in sharing esoteric knowledge, inability to adapt to the creative oral expression in the changing situations, lack of support from the patrons (clan masters), and lack of a long-term plan by the people to regenerate the traditional knowledge are some of the problems found among the singers which discourages them from their profession. They are the singer-castes who safeguard the culture, but their knowledge is now endangered.

The socio-economic status of the Gonds and Kondhs is better than any of the other tribes; they have achieved higher status in service and politics. They could very well patronize their caste singers, but that has not been possible owing to the indifferent attitude of their patrons. Very few clan masters understand the importance of their culture bearers. The ethnic singers are now the most deprived community in the society. They are gradually losing their ethnic knowledge.

Selection of Singers/Ethnic Bards

The Gonds and the Kondhs are two dominant tribal communities. The Bhunjias and the Paharias are the primitive tribal communities. The Banjara is the nomadic tribal community. These tribes have been identified for the collection of oral epics.

The Magadha Gaurs, a settled agriculturist caste of Kalahandi, is the major caste group in the district next to the Gond and the Kondh. They are rich sources of heroic epics. Besides, the occupation castes such as Doms, Kalars, Teli, Mali, Kumbhar, and Keutes are found in the district with their ethnic singers.

Selection of singers was made on the basis of

(i) Density of tribal population;

(ii) Availability of bardic tradition;

(iii) Availability of a performance context;

(iv) Willingness of priest and singers to share their songs.

The selection of authentic singers among the Gonds and the Kondhs was made from the clan master's recommendation. Eastern Kalahandi is dominated by the Kondhs and western Kalahandi (presently Nuapada district) by the Gonds.

The *Jati Mahasabha*, traditional tribal leaders' organization of the Gonds, Kondhs, and the Magadha Gaurs helped immensely in discovering the ethnic singers and clan bards. However, after listening to the clan singers, it was found that the bards almost share the knowledge and history of their castes/clans from the common stock of myths and epics.

Collection of Data

Collection of oral epics was made by directly interacting with the epic singers, priests, priestess, and narrators. Collection of data was made from the professional singers/ clan bards and priests rich in mythical knowledge. The castes and tribes having their caste bards/professional singers have performed the songs in ritual and performance contexts. The solo singers have also sung the oral epics which were collected in a simulated situation. The audience during the performance was the stimulating factor for the singers. During the fieldwork, many people discussed their lost history and caste glory. Indifference towards their own social history and getting sucked into day-to-day activities of life are the major concerns of the community. The devices used during the fieldwork were audio recorder and video recorder. Besides informal discussion, sharing the texts with the senior people to understand the context of using the information and derive the meanings was very helpful.

Data collected in a sung form were translated to poetry form and texts collected in prose narrative form were retained in the same form. After translation of data, these were discussed with the singers and the senior patrons to understand the context and meaning. Some cultural leaders of the respective ethnic groups were immensely helpful by contributing to the discussion.

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3

Singers of Oral Epics

Realm of Oral Epics

Oral tradition in Kalahandi is found in almost all villagers irrespective of age, sex, and status. As most of the people live in a traditional society, their life is more attached to nature and the supernatural. It is the integrated worldview of mankind in relation to his natural world and interdependence that shapes their creative world. Therefore, human life in Kalahandi is close to nature and more affiliated to a bond of nature-human relationships that creates a space among many ethnic groups to coexist. They share a common culture although their caste is different from one another. The commonality of values and beliefs, and their cultural affiliation to nature and the universe has facilitated their creation of many verbal arts and visual arts. These are the manifestations of their visible world as well as invisible ideas, values, beliefs, and morals. Their association of life with nature and society as a unifying space begins from birth and continues till the end of life. Women, children–young and old–and every age group have their creative expression in different contexts of life.

Oral songs for children's bed time, lullabies, traditional games and play songs, work songs, ploughman's songs, mythical songs, women's lore, folktales of birds and animals, long tales, small stories, legends, myths and tales, oral epics and caste genealogies, music and dance, and folk drama are the creative expressions found in the social life of Kalahandi.

While the songs and tales have their own audience, oral epics and myths are shared by the old men. While riddles are for the children and youth, proverbs are used to propogate social values and social behaviour. Thus oral tradition validates the universally-accepted rules and practices of the society.

These oral traditions can be found in any village of Kalahandi though they are in a stage of transition because of modernity. The question is why and how these art forms are gradually losing their ground owing to modernization.

Ethnic Singers of Oral Epics

As mentioned earlier, the occupation-based castes in the villages and the tribal communities in the forest have formed the settlements. The Kondh tribe in eastern

Kalahandi and the Gonds in western Kalahandi were the landowners exercising administrative powers. They also exercise a religious hierarchy now. The structure of village administration and religious function of the Gonds and the Kondhs are still prevalent in the tribal villages of Kalahandi despite the modern Panchayati Raj system. The village headman is called the Gauntia. The religious head is Jhankar for the Gonds and Jani for the Kondhs. The religious practices are still prevalent in the Kondh- and Gond-dominated villages.

Distribution of castes and tribes provides the foundation for maintaining the knowledge system in Kalahandi. This population is the source to promote the traditional knowledge resources among their own community. This may be evident from the tribal population distributed in Kalahandi.

I. Tribes and Castes as Oral Epic Resources (Table I)

Name of the tribe/ caste	Total population in the state	Population in Kalahandi district	Location
Gond	7,01,139	1,72,686	Boden, Komna, Sinapali, Nuapada, Jaipatna
Kondh	11,40,374	1,46,225	Lanjigarh, Narla, Thuamul Rampur
Bhunjia	11,276	7,142	Nuapada, Koraput
Banjara	12,843	6,168	Nuapada and Kalahandi
Paharia (Kamar)	3,159	2,959	Nuapada
Parghania (A sub-group among Gonds)		541	Nuapada
Bogua (A sub-group among Kondhs)		254	Bhawanipatna
Maral (A sub-group among Kondhs)		134	Bhawanipatna
Debgunias (An independent caste group)		349	Nuapada, Khariar, Sinapali

The caste genealogies, origin myth of these tribes, and the local history recited by the caste bards indicate the predominance of the Gonds and the Kondhs as the traditional administrative heads who exercised their powers over Kalahandi. Their clan bards depended on them. Other than these dominant tribal rulers, other tribes and castes also have their respective bards. Those who do not have caste-bards have specialists from the society to retain their ethnic history and legends through oral narratives.

The bards have their own clan masters. They are sub-divided into various clans according to their own clan master. The bards earn their livelihood by singing epic songs, making handicrafts, and tattooing. Most of them are nomads, wandering from one place to another for six to seven months in a year. They have their own land and house away from their clan master's house.

The epic singers of Kalahandi may be broadly categorized under the following heads:

1. Ethnic singers or professional caste bard,
2. Castes and tribes having no bardic tradition, but who sing epic songs,
3. Priest group in tribal community - male and female priests, and
4. Singers independent of castes and tribes.

In Kalahandi, the following castes and tribes have ethnic bards.

I. Ethnic Singers

1. Ethnic Singers or Professional Caste Bard (Table II)

Tribe	Caste Bard/ Ethnic Bard	Musical Instruments	Name of Songs
Gond and Bhatara	Parghania	*Kikri, Bana*	*Purja;* *Chital Singh Chhatri.*
Kondh	Maral Bogua	*Dhundhunia*	*Janamkhena;* *Bhima Sidi;* *Nangmati Rajaphulia.*
Binjhal	Birthia	*Mandal, Jhanj* (Cymbals)	*Jati Janam,* Origin of Binjhal festival epic song; Bariha king Borasambar.
Banjara	Bhat	*Dhap*	Meramma – creation of Goddess; Lakha Banjara – on culture hero Mithu Bhukia and Sewa Bhaya, a Banjara God
Gaurs	Ghogia Jhapak	*Brahmaveena*	*Kharatmal;* *Barakhena;* *Bansgeet.*
Dom	Birthia	*Muhuri, Tasa,* and *Dhol*	*Jati janam* (how they became a musician community); *Madhab King Katha – geet;* *Salab King Katha – geet.*

II. Castes/Tribes without Bardic Tradition, but who sing Epic Songs

The dominant occupation-based artisan castes such as Mali, Teli, Keuts, and Kumhars and the tribes such as the Bhunjias, Paharias (Kamars), and Sabars have no caste-bards. But they have their origin myth and epic songs on their cultural heroes and ancestors.

The singers are emerge from the community itself. They can neither be equated to the caste-bard nor are they patronized by their community for their singing. Anyone who is keen to master the epic songs can be a singer in his own community. It is told that they had their epic singers or clan bards, but in course of time, the bardic custom was abolished owing to the heavy demands made by the clan bard.

The following castes/tribes have no caste-genealogists, but singers among their community can retain their ethnic knowledge.

2. Castes/Tribes without Bardic Tradition but who Sing Epic Songs (Table III)

Caste	Tribe	Epic songs/Cultural Hero and Narration on Supreme Gods.
	Bhunjia	Origin of Bhunjia; *KachhraDhurua* - a cultural hero of the Bhunjias.
	Paharia (Kamar)	Baddevtar Khena – Origin myth; Gandhu *Paradhia* – Cultural hero myth.
	Sabar	Dance song; Song of tattooing; Romance epics of Oriya literature – *Sashisena, Jarasabar Vidyapati Lalita;* Origin of Lord Jagannath.
Teli	Bhat	Caste origin from Lord Siva and Parvati; Caste occupation ritual song: marriage of Gods and Goddesses (Siva and Parvati).
Keut (Fisher folk)		*Kaivarta Geet* – Origin of Kaivarta caste from Brahma and Vishnu (associated with sage Parasara – father of Vyasa)
Kumhar (Potter)		Origin myth; Epic story of king Chandradhwaja; Kurala Purana by Poet Deena Krishna Das.
Mali		Origin myth; Ritual songs.

III. Priests/Priestesses Attached to a Caste or Tribe

The priests and priestess of different castes and tribes perform the rituals and play the role of the sacred singers. They retain the mythical epics of the origin of the Gods and Goddesses and transmit it only to the persons who are the priests revealed in their dreams by the deities. The priests also recite the local legends on the migration of deities or the authority of a God and/or Goddess over another. Similarly, the myths and legends of the ethnic heroes and heroines associated with the Gods and Goddesses are also sung by the priests on different occasions. For instance, during *Dasahara* or *Navanna*, the mythical songs are narrated while the ritual that is instituted is purely assigned to Gods and Goddesses. But during the worship of the ancestors (the *Duma*), the priest narrates the glorious deeds of the *Duma*, which is exclusively for ancestor worship. In the Gond community, The Jhankar and the Dihari are the priest and the shaman, respectively. The Kondh priest and shaman are called Jani and Dishari, respectively. While the Dihari or Dishari – the Shaman completely – represents the Gods, Goddesses, or *Duma*, the priest mediates between the supernatural and the humans. He communicates the conversations

between the spirit and man. The first progenitor is mythologized, whereas the *Duma* of recent past are all ancestor-spirits and cultural heroes.

The epic songs are considered sacred and have certain roles and functions in awakening the caste/tribe to his glorious heritage. The status and functions of the priests are presented in Table IV.

3. Priests as Singers of Mythical Narratives (Table – IV)

Tribe	Priest	Shaman	Myths & Sacred Epics	Functions
Gond	Jhankar	Dihari	*Budharaja, Lingadeo*	Ancestor worship
Kondh	Govajani Khutjani Jogiani	Dihari	*Jungadeo, Janamkhena Purana,* Caste Origin & Settlement Buffalo Sacrifice	Good harvest, ancestor worship, appeases mother earth
Kondh	Gurumai	Gurumai	*Bhima Sidi*	Marriage of rain God Bhima with Kondhen.
Bhunjia	Female	Female	*Bhima Biha* (seven-day ritual)	
Parja	Ghogein	Shaman		
Bhunjia	Jhankar	Dihari	Origin of Goddess; Origin of Bhunjia *(Kachhradhuma)*	Annual ritual and ancestor worship.

IV. Singers Independent of Castes and Tribes

There are some singer communities independent of castes and tribes. They are known as Debgunias and Basudevia Brahmins and are found in Kalahandi adjoining the Gariabandh district of Chhatishgarh.

Debgunia is a professional singer-community that depends on the people for their livelihood. They go from door to door singing the glory of Goddess Lakshmi, selling paddy craft, and seeking alms. They move around the villages especially in the month of *Margasira* (December-January). They are a local non-tribal caste.

The women-folk purchase the images of Goddess Lakshmi, elephants, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, Goddess Subhadra, and Lord Ganesh that are made of paddy and put them in the worship place and worship them throughout the year. They also listen to the epic mythology of Goddess Lakshmi and offer alms to the Debgunias. Sometimes, the villagers arrange the Puran performance programme especially in the month of *Margasira.* Besides, the Debgunias are the scribes on palm leaf manuscripts and are popular as *Natguru* – drama director – in rural areas. They write plays on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* episodes and organize folk drama.

The Basudevia Brahmins are also a local caste. Whether they are of tribal origin or is not known.

However, their culture, customs, and status is no better than a local tribal Gond. Like the Parghania of the Gonds, they use *Kikri*, a local fiddle, and sing a local version of the *Ramayana*.

The *Geet Kudias* and the *Geet Kudien* are talented singers known for their spontaneous rendition of songs in a performance context, especially when a dance or song competition between the *Dhangra* and *Dhangri* – young boys and girls – is organized in a village. They also sing the epic songs; though they are not professionals, they know the local legends, epic songs, riddles, songs and myths, etc.

Besides, the villagers living with the tribal communities have deep knowledge of the tribal language and culture. For instance, barber families living with Parajas and potter families living with the Bhunjias know their culture and language as they share the songs and narratives. Thus multi-culturalism has a space in the villages of Kalahandi. Details of the singers are given in Table V:

4. Professional Singers (Table – V)

Category	Singer	Epics	Musical Instruments	Function
Professional	Debgunia (also known as Debguru)	*Lakshmi Puran*, Legendary epics, Folktales	*Brahmaveena*	1. Worship of Goddess Lakshmi. 2. Sung during preparation of paddy crafts. 3. As a public performance. 4. Sung during preparation of palm-leaf manuscripts. 5. Sung as legendary epics on local heroes.
	Basudevia Brahmins (male)	Local versions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.	*Kikri*	1. Recited as sacred epic songs (a local narrative to invoke mythical epics). 2. Sung as legendary epic stories. 3. Folktales on cultural heroes (Prose-verse).
Occasional	*Geet Kudia*	Love songs and folktales.		Sung for dance. Songs composed for performance context.
	Geet Kudien	Love songs and folktales.	Ramkathi	Compose songs for performance context. Narrate folktales and invoke narrative songs.

In Kalahandi, the Gonds have a rich cultural heritage dating back to the later medieval period in the history of India. They have been divided into eight clans (*Saga*); each clan has its own clan bard. They are known as Parghania in Kalahandi and Chhatishgarh, Pradhan in Madhya Pradesh and Patri[1] in Andhra Pradesh. The Parghanias of the respective clans recite the origin myth of their Gods and Goddesses and the origin myth of the Gonds. He also sings the glorious history of their clan heroes. Although the Gonds have been divided into eight *saga*-clans, they believe in their common ancestry, sharing the common mythology of their origin. The Parghanias are identified to have originated from the Gonds, but practically their social status is not superior to that of the Gonds. The Baiga tribe of Central India has it's bards known as Bhima and Pradhan. The Banjara tribes of Kalahandi migrated from Central India for the promotion of their trade and commerce. They have a legendary eventful history of migration, which they sing. The song is known as *Ladan Lada* or *Khadu geet*, which bears the cultural heritage of their life from the past to present. A picture of their social customs and traditions are depicted in these songs. The *Gova Utra* songs, also known as *Janam Khena* Puran, which are recited during the buffalo-sacrifice rituals by Kondhs are the mythical songs which have influenced their caste epic. The epic songs of *Rikhmun*, *Tulsivir*, *Kholagadia Raja*, and *Khalinia bir* are found among the Bhunjia singers. The songs of *Gandhu Paradhia*, *Kokobhaini*, *Marandi Potura*, *Udulia geet*, *Siraram rout*, *Dodok geet* found among the Paharias, are some examples of long epic songs. Similarly, other castes such as Kalars, Telis, Kumbhars, Malis, and Gaurs have their own caste-bards to keep their oral ethnic lore alive. Apart from all these the Debgunias are the professional singers of the *Bramhanda puran* or *Lakshmi puran*. They borrow the Hindu mythical narratives, widely known as *Maharapurana* and reinterpret them in the context of local traditions.

All these epic songs characteristically form the history of the caste songs called *geet* . In Chhatishgarh, the folk epics are locally known as *geet* such as *Lorik geet*, *Chandeni geet*, *Pandavani geet*, and *Bansgeet*. Similarly, in Kalahandi adjoining western Orissa these narrative songs are known as *geet*.

The caste bard sings each song for more than seven to eight hours. The *geet* are constituents of five, seven, and twelve cycles. It takes many nights together to complete the epic cycles. The bards move from one master to another throughout the year. Their clan masters patronize them financially. The bard may move to his master's house with his family and stay there for seven to eight days till an epic cycle is completed.

When a bard arrives at his master's house, the latter welcomes him with a jug of water. The clan headman worships the *bana* and *chhatra* ,that are the symbols of their clan Gods and Goddesses, and receives the bard. The clan master provides food and shelter and makes proper arrangements for the Parghania. The expenses of the bard are borne by the whole community headed by the headman. In the evening, after supper, all members of the clan irrespective of age and sex assemble in a common place to hear from the bard, about the glorious heritage of their cultural heroes. Everyone in the community believes that the *geet* sung by the bard is real, that it happened in the past and that they are the descendants of their glorious cultural heroes. Thus, they all believe in the supernatural powers of their ancestors and worship them as their mythical and

cultural heroes. These epic songs are also sung during marriage ceremonies inorder to inspire the community by the heroic deeds of their respective castes. These songs are regarded as auspicious and used during rites and rituals. Initiation into culture takes place during these rituals and this validates their caste glory. This act connects their past with the present and brings a continuity between family histories and the greater clan history.

The Content

The content of the epic songs vary according to performance contexts. These can broadly be divided into sacred narratives and secular narratives, sung by the caste genealogists/caste bard and epic singers respectively.

Sacred Narratives

The sacred narratives have a fixed place, time, and set of rules for performance; conducted by the priest for specific religious and ritualistic purposes. During rites and rituals, fairs and festivals, they are invocation of *duma*, the Jani or Gurumai recite the song to glorify the heritage of the Gods, Goddesses, and ancestor spirits. These narrations are believed to be true. The narratives during the rituals or festivals that are recited bear indications of the rules for performing the ritual systematically.

The contents of the sacred narratives are mainly of the origin of the universe, origin of the Earth and nature, evolution of animals and human beings, procreation of mankind, struggle for survival, familial and social bonds, kinship, migration and settlement, ethnic groups, clan-wise distribution of land and jungle, distribution of Gods and Goddesses by the clans, history of fights with other tribes for land and jungle, settlement of villages, sharing of land with their supporter caste-groups, dissemination of caste/tribe to other areas, invention of farming technology and iron instruments, cultivation of paddy and pulses, village administration and religious organization, friendship and hostility with other ethnic groups, worship of the Gods and Goddesses for their own victory and security, and worship of the first progenitor, first priest and the first ancestor.

The Parghanias recite the caste genealogy *Purja* which is a long, sacred narrative. The Gond priest Jhankar recites the invocation song on Chaturbhuj Budhadeo, Lingadeo, and Janghadeo that represents the ancient glory of the Gonds.

The Bogua and the Marals, two distinct ethnic bards of the Kondhs, recite *Janamkhena* and *Bhima Sidi*. Bhima is the rain god and a cultural hero of the Kondhs.

Similarly, the Birthia for Binjhal tribe and the Birthia for the Doms recite the *Jati Janam* and *Purthi Janam* during the Dasahara festival and community rituals. The Kamars recite *Baddevtar Khena* as their creation myth.

The Ghogia for Gaur caste sing *Barakhena Bansgeet* that represents their clan Gods and Goddesses. The narratives are recited during their post-harvest festivals and during marriage ceremonies.

The Gurumai and the Parghanien (wife of the Parghania) in Gond, Kondh and Bhunjia communities invoke the *Duma utra* song (invocation of the deceased soul to the house) which is the family history or caste genealogy of the respective tribes. *Bhima Biha* (marriage ritual of rain god Bhima) is another ritual found among these tribes that is performed in places where there is scarcity of rain or where drought occurs. People organize a marriage ceremony for the Rain God Bhima with a young girl from the tribe named Kondhen, and the ritual marriage is believed to result in ample rain for their harvest.

The sacred narratives are thus known as *Janam Khand Puran, Baddevtar Khena, Jati Janam* and *Purthi Janam, Purja, Bhima Sidi* and *Bhima Biha* etc. All these narrative poetry are commonly termed as *Geet, Puran* or *Khena, Janam Khand* and also *Jati Puran*. The mythical puran of the fisher folk caste is popularly known as *Kaivarta Geeta* (the sacred book of the fisher-folk caste).

The content of the sacred narrative varies from tribe to tribe depending on their socio-economic status. The Gonds have their *Purja* in which the history of the Raj Gonds is narrated. They were the land owners and administrative heads. The Kondhs have already adopted cultivation as their major occupation. In their *Pod puja*, buffalo-sacrifice festival, the main priest (Govajani) worships Dharnimata – Goddess Mother Earth, Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth), and Goddess Durga (Goddess of Power). Different Gods and Goddesses take different kinds of food. So the priest offers milk to Lakshmi and sacrifices a buffalo for Goddess Durga.

The buffalo-sacrifice ritual clearly reflects the stages of origin, migration, settlement, transition from food-gatherer to food-producer, and ultimately the land owner and local administrator of their *chak*. The Kamars – a minority tribe – in their creation myth *Baddevtar Khena*, which is a long narrative song, invoke their supreme God to help them in hunting and collecting forest products and pray for the virgin jungle to be guarded from external attack. This is because they still live on forest products and hunting.

The main functions of the sacred narratives are to ensure security of the community by getting ample harvest, gaining all worldly objects, keeping the jungle evergreen, and getting food and rain for their sustenance. They appease their ancestor spirits and the supreme Gods for all these objects. They believe that if their ancestor spirits are not satisfied with their actions, they will be cursed. Therefore, they promise their Gods and ancestors that they are righteous and have not violated the morals and ethics they have inherited from their ancestors. Their possibility of gaining the worldly objects as stated above are symbolically examined in the ritual performance and success or failure is ensured and accordingly, they establish their confidence in their past and regulate the present.

Epics of Cultural Heroes- Secular Epics

The narrative songs which have the flexibility of performance any audience irrespective of caste, sex, and age may be termed as secular epics.[2] These have emerged from the

sacred narratives with a strong ethnic background; they are less religious and more legendary. They are called *Akhyana* – commonly termed as *Khena*, or *Geet*, or *Katha* in the society. These epic stories are believed to be true and represent their ethnic heroes of the recent past who are attached to a place, time, and event.

The professional epic singers of the aforementioned categories have a major stock of *geet* and *Katha* related to their cultural heroes and legendary heroes with an ethno-historical background.

Each ethnic group has its own epic narratives that have emerged from their social aspirations and are grounded in their cultural context. The Gond tribe of Kalahandi has the representative epic songs such as *Chital Singh Chhatri*, *Lohagundi Raja*, *Kadel Kachhar Katha* and *Kachhra Dhurua Geet*. As the Gonds of Kalahandi have a rich cultural heritage associated with the Gonds of Central India, they have a number of local heroic legends that are sung by the Parghanias.

The Boguas and the Marals are Kondh bards who sing narratives such as *Madhab King Katha*, *Nangmati Rajaphulia* and *Maradeo Raja Katha*. *Nangmati Rajaphulia* is a tragic epic-song recited by the Boguas in which the heroine had to commit suicide when she found that the hero she had chosen as her husband was none except her own brother. *Maradeo Raja Katha* is the secularized form of the mythical song of the Kondhs.

The Banjaras have their clan bard known as Bhat. The Banjaras are from Rajasthan. They sing the epic songs *Lakha Banjara* and *Sobhanaik Banjara* which represent their ethnic occupation and the heroic actions of the Banjara cultural heroes. The Kamars or the Paharias have a number of epic narratives. *Gandhu Paradhia*, *Kokobhaini*, *Luhagundi Raja* and *Kamul surua Raja* are some of the popular epic songs representing their ethnic culture. Similarly, the Binjhals also have epic songs such as the karma song and the narrative songs. The Bhunjias have the *Allah Udal* and *Khalnia Veer Katha* depicting their culture.

Each narrative is nominated to the main dramatic personae of the epic. The Gaur epic songs have been named according to the name of the hero and heroine. There are 12 *Khena* or 12 episodes. Each episode represents the story of a hero and the heroine, for example,

i) *Rupdhar – Hirandri Khena*

ii) *Sunadhar – Ramela Khena*

iii) *Kotrabaina – Ramela Khena*

iv) *Hadukurria – Nilendri Khena*

The content of the secular epic songs depicts the themes of love, war, victory, gaining or regaining a kingdom, supremacy over other tribes, etc. The content and motifs of these epics have striking resemblances with that of the metrical romance of Europe. The epic story has imaginary elements with fantasy representing the demi-Gods and Goddesses of the spiritual world pertaining to the traditional culture. Magic, witchcraft,

and sorcery are the elements which help the hero and villains become powerful men. The supernatural power helps the hero and the heroine in winning the race. In tribal epics, innovations in agriculture and inventing equipment for agricultural work, getting water from Indra and the demi-God Bhima (Rain God) for the field, and yielding a bumper harvest are some of the important characteristics to be an ideal hero. The distinct occupation and the custom of the tribes are charted out in their epics. In most of the heroic epics, the hero is neglected by his elderly parents. The hero leaves the house. On the way, he faces many obstacles and overcomes them with supernatural help from saints, friends, gods and goddesses. Frame-repetitions are recurrent in such epics and ultimately the hero wins the race after punishing or killing the villains/enemies. He is also rewarded with the re-acquisition of his power and marriage to beautiful girls.

Visual Epic or *Drusya Kavya*

Interestingly, some of the local epic stories found among the tribes have been found in dramatic form, which clearly indicates the multi-generic form of folk epics. The Kondh – Paraja tribes and the Dom caste perform the epic drama called *Desianaat* which means regional drama. *Desia* is a link language in Kalahandi and Koraput districts used by more than 51 tribes and other non-tribals. This epic story performed in dramatic form reminds us of the *Kavya-natya* (epic-drama) form as the dialogues in *Desianaat* are in verse form composed by the local folk dramatist. At times, the professional singers compose such epic dramas.

While the sacred narratives have religious functions, the secular narratives have socio-cultural functions. It is related to their legendary heroes of recent past who are vivid in their memory. Through the chronological arrangements of various events of their cultural heroes, they try to relate their caste history and genealogies with some place and time. Thus, the characters of these narratives are half-true and half-imaginary. It is found that even in the secular epic, the replica of the mythical characters of the great epics of the country are clearly discernable. However, the ethnic epics represent the racial memory and ethnic identity of the tribes, though they are secular in nature. It helps in promoting their group consciousness and ethnic solidarity.

Transmission of Oral Epics among the Singers

The sacred narratives are transmitted from one generation to another by professional priests/singers. The Parghanias recite *Purja* or caste genealogies of the Gonds, which is considered a secret and is not taught to others except family members, that is, to male persons only in the context of ritual performance. Similarly, the Govajani priest singer of the Kondhs sings the *Gova Utra Geet* only in the ritual place of Goddess Dharnimata during the buffalo-sacrifice festival (*Pod Puja*). The recitation starts in the evening and continues the whole night till the next morning. New singers assist the Govajani and the learning of the narrative is achieved by rote memory. Similarly, the Boguas and the Marals (the Kondh bards) also teach their oral epic songs to their family members only. The clan bard, priest, and the Gurumai are prohibited from reciting the song without

a fixed ritual for the Gods and Goddesses. Some rituals take place once in 12 years: the *Pod Puja* or the buffalo sacrifice of the Kondhs. In this case, the Govajani fails to present the narrative in order and the elderly persons from the community help him in re-arranging the events.

The singers sing the episodes of the cultural heroes. There is no fixed time and place for it, but most of the performance takes place at night.

Each main singer has three to four younger singers accompanied by musical instruments. The junior singers master the narratives by repeating the main line of the main singer, which also helps the audience understand the narrative. The sacred epics are performed in this manner. But the heroic epic songs are recited by the singer using meaningless syllables till he memorizes it. Furthermore, his refrain helps him in taking a pause to jump from one event to another. While the method of transmission of sacred narratives is vertical within the family and clan group, it is horizontal with respect to secular epics.

Epic Composition

Each ethnic group has its own epic cycle. It consists of two, five, and twelve cycles. Each cycle is known as *Khena*, *Khand*, *Katha*, or *Geet*. The local meaning of *Khena* is 'branch of a tree'. Most probably, the nomenclature might have been derived form the Sanskrit word *Akhyana*. *Khand* means a part of the whole purana or epic cycle. In Sanskrit, epics such as *Koshala khand* and *Utkala Khand* are available. Similarly, the *Bhima Sidi* sung by the priests and Gurumai are divided into *Janamkhand Puran* and *Nagar Khand Puran*. In the first part, the birth of the hero and in the second, his heroic deeds are described. *Katha* and *Geet* means tales and songs. The epic song represents a tale performed in the narrative poetry form. Thus, the *Katha* and *Geet* attributed to the epic are justified.

The most important aspect of epic study is textualizing the epic performance into an epic from the mental text of the poet and its verbal expression, with the texture and the nature of composition. The singers are not literate, so their epic songs are always found in oral form. Hence, their epic composition is based on their epic performance. The nature of composition varies from one performance to another owing to the performance context such as time, mood of the singer, and the audience's response. However, the content of the epics is revealed through some culture-specific language and metaphorical phrases which help the traditional singer express the texts in a given framework. Therefore, the language of the epic text is different from the day-to-day spoken language of the same singer or audience. It has a literary and cultural flavour. However, the structure of the epic remains intact; it means they compose the epics without breaking the story.

In course of the performance, it is found that the epic narratives are engrained with multiple genres of folklore: proverbs, folk metaphors, images, similes, phrases, songs, lullabies, and lamentations and so on to make the epics lively. The arrangement of episodes in the mental text of the singer is expressed through the poetic folk language

and cultural symbols. Each episode in an oral epic or a myth is like a tree with various branches (*Khena*). The singer has to link each branch with the other and arrange the episodes in such a manner that the events will have a logical sequence leading to the total epic text in a systematic order, so that the epic tree is complete with all the branches.

During the epic performance, if the singer fails to correlate one episode with another and distorts the text, the elderly persons from the audience guide him. They tell the singer, 'you must water the plants in such a manner that it will flow from the beginning to the end without breaking its flow'. According to them, the epic is a tree and the singer is a gardener. He must know how to nourish the epic tree in order to make it green with leaves, bear the fragrance of flowers, and result in fruits.

Most of the epics and caste genealogies are in the form of a long narrative form. The Bhima Sidi is recited for seven nights and *Barakhena Bansgeet* for twelve nights. The youngsters learn it by the process of rote memory, that is, while performing they repeat the main line sung by the singer. This is the essence of the song. Hence, it is called *Gova*. The age-old proverbs, sayings, and experience form the essence of the song which is related to customs, rituals, and tradition.

Transition in Epic Narrative

Owing to the influence of the puranic tradition, the bards infuse the ethnic epics with puranic mythical characters and events. When the episodes, or events, or characters of Puranas are found similar to the ethnic hero of their traditional epics, that particular episode is regenerated to form a new composition in the mental text of the bard. The assimilation of ethnic and puranic cultures gives a new force to the epic singers and the ethnic group to extend their glorious heritage to the puranic tradition of India. For instance, the Debgunias claim their ancestry from Devaguru Vrihaspati and the Basudevia Brahmins from the Brahmins of Gaya of the *Ramayana* age. The Parghanias are said to have their origin from Lord Shiva or Mahadev. The fisher folk (keut) associate themselves with sage Parasara and the Kumbhar community with the Pandavas after *Draupadi Swayamvara* etc. Through this process, the local epic heroes have been characterized as the puranic epic heroes.

Ethnography of the Ethnic Singers

The Parghania among the Gonds, and the Bogua and Maral among the Kondhs are some of the significant ethnic singers in Kalahandi whose lifestyle is important to maintain their professional occupation as singers. Similarly, the Jhapak or Ghogia are the singers of the Gaur caste. While conducting the field work, it was necessary to listen to the ethnic singers of these three caste and tribes. Interaction with them revealed that they respect the caste glory and follow the customs and principles fixed by their forefathers.

The Gond bards of Kalahandi adjoining Chhatishgarh are known as Parghania. Parghania is derived from the word *Parghana* (a cluster of villages in Chhatishgarh and Kalahandi was identified as *Parghana*). It is said that 84 villages constitute a *Parghana* with

a Zamindar. Western Orissa and Chhatishgarh were predominantly ruled by the Gond rulers and were identified with a particular land or *Parghana.* The Gonds have clan-based territories. The Gond bards, accordingly, were distributed among their clan masters. Out of eight *Saga* (Clan) Gonds of Kalahandi, there emerged eight clan bards and each clan bard served his own clan master's territory as his own occupation area. No clan bard depended on any other than his or her clan master's house.

The Parghanias identify themselves as the younger brothers of the Gonds and claim common ancestry, though the Gonds disagree with it. The Gonds say that they are superior and in no way their clan bards are equal to Parghanias. Instead, as the parghanias accept alms (*Sukdan*, *bachhadan* etc.) from their Gond clan master, the Gonds say that the Parghanias are an inferior-caste group, who emerged from their caste. The Parghanias are a sub-group of the Gond tribe. They move from one village to another taking their *Vana*, which is a symbol of their caste. It is an indigenous fiddle called *Kikri.* They sing the Gondi epic songs, hymns, and caste genealogy in their clan master's house. In their clan master's house, they get down with their *Vana* – which is worshipped by the Gonds. The Gonds welcome, the Parghania by offering him a jug of water and worshipping the fiddle which symbolizes a cordial invitation to the Parghania. Singing and story-telling, tattooing, worshipping the clan gods and goddesses, making beads, playing musical instruments, decorating the hair and tying the Gond woman's hair into a knot are some of the activities performed by the *Parghanien* – wife of the Parghania. They don't sing the mythical narrative. This indicates the role specification of the male and female singers. While the males have the authority of singing the sacred songs in the public sphere, the women take care of their Gond women in the village in the domestic sphere.

The Parghanias sing the Gondi epic songs, hymns, and caste genealogy in their clan master's house. It is said that without the help of the Parghania, a Gond cannot imagine conducting a birth ceremony, death ceremony, or a marriage. Invoking the ancestor spirit *Duma* by the Gonds is possible only when a Parghania and his wife are present. They are the priests of the Gond caste.

The Parghanias visit their clan masters on two occasions: during social ceremonies such as birth, death, and marriage and the other is on casual occasions. During off-season, they come to their clan master to earn their livelihood. The Parghanias normally visit their clan masters once or twice a year. While attending the rites of passage, they demand and receive alms such as *Janamdan* (alms for the birth of a child), *Dudhkhia dan* (alms given for the birth of a child to the Parghania's clan master's daughter in her mother-in-law's house), and *Sukdan* (alms on death rites).

During marriage ceremonies, the Parghania and his wife conduct many activities such as singing songs in different stages of the marriage rituals, and dressing and ornamenting the bride and bridegroom during the ceremony. For playing the fiddle during the auspicious moment—*Lagan*, the Parghania takes the bridegroom's turban as the token of his (Parghania's) prestige. During the daughter's marriage, the clan master

never asks the Parghania to perform his rituals. It is only during the son's marriage that the Parghania is invited.

While attending death rituals, the Parghania uses the materials and furniture of the deceased person. He takes *marhadan*—alms in the death of a person from the clan master. After the purification ritual, the Parghania returns to his house with the alms.

Duma utren is a ritual invocation of the ancestor spirit of a deceased person. During this ritual, the soul of a deceased person is invoked and worshipped in the kitchen of the Gonds. The *Duma* is invited. The instituition of the ritual is similar to a marriage ceremony.

Purja: Gond Caste Genealogy

The Gond caste genealogies, caste myth, oral epics, and hymns are sung by the Parghanias in the Gondi language. This language is not spoken except during religious ceremonies. It clearly indicates that the caste myths and genealogies are esoteric texts, which are not shared by other caste groups; a caste myth is not sung by a singer of another clan group, even if both the clans may belong to the Gond tribe.

Purja is the caste genealogy of the Gonds. It is the origin myth created by the supreme God of the Gonds; its first progenitor was Linga Deo, who listened to it. Linga Deo wanted to popularize this and his first servant became the Parghania who knew all these myths and genealogies.

The ethnic bard Parghania remembers the *Purja*. The male members of the Parghania's family who learn the *Purja* from the elders transmit it from one generation to the next.

It is mandatory for each Gond family/clan to listen to the *Purja* from their Parghania at least once a year. Although the relevance of such *Purja* in today's world is very little, during marriage, death rituals, and invocation of the ancestor spirit, the *Purja* plays an important role in remembering the past glory of the Gonds. Most of the *Purjas* are oral history and caste genealogies. During the later part of nineteenth century and upto 1950, palm-leaf scribers belonging to the pastoral community (Gaur) and Bairagi (a Vaishnaba) community wrote the Gond *Purja* on palm-leaf manuscripts. Thereafter, the *purja* was written with pen and paper.

The Parghanias consider themselves as the younger brothers of the Gonds. There is a proverb that means the Gonds are the elder brothers, so they hold the *Chhatra* as the symbol of administrative power, and the younger brother holds the *Vana* and *Kikri* as the symbol of the Gond God. They sang the eulogy of their elder brother who was Raj Gond (Royal Gond). When a Parghania arrives at a patron's house, he recites the eulogy of the Gonds. The Parghania says:

Baradhar guma
Suradhar sandu
Gatidar bajarsri
Ajira Chanchala
Inju kaike

Only the Parghania knows the esoteric meaning of the above recitation. The clan master/ patron replies:

> 'Oh, my God has appeared. Let's worship him with incense, molasses and ghee.'

Parghania says:

> 'O *majhi*, I have come to you. You have got this God from your ancestors. You have to obey your God. You give alms for your betterment.'

The patron gives gold, cows, bullocks, rice, paddy, salt, turmeric, chilly etc. and says,

> 'Babu, this much is with me, please be happy with this. I will satisfy you next year.'

The Parghania blesses the patron,

> 'Chaturbhuj Budhadeo will keep you happy. You will lead and win everywhere.'

Then again the Parghania recites his Gondi hymn – '*Baradhar guma*.........'

The Gond patrons first of all invite the Parghania and worship the *Vana* by offering incense and water and next they arrange food for them. Around 8.00 in the evening, all the people of the Gond community assemble in one place. The Parghania worships his *Kikri* and *Vana;* the *chhatra* brought by the Parghania is worshipped by the Gonds. Thereafter, the Parghania recites the worship and eulogy of the supreme Gods of the Gonds: Chaturbhuj Budhadeo, Lingadeo, and Janghadeo.

After that, the Parghania, assisted by two or three young singers, starts singing the *Purja*. The audience believes the narration to be true. They also remember the caste lineage. The older persons in the Gond community also recapitulate the accurate caste lineage and share it with the Parghania.

The audience enjoys the narration. They feel proud of the glorified heroic deeds of the Gods and heroes of the Gonds. The categories of narratives recited by the Parghanias are as follows:

Sacred Narratives

1. Creation myth of the Universe.
2. Creation myth of the Gods / Goddesses.
3. Creation of the earth, birds, and animals.
4. Shiva – Mahadeo as the first cultivator.
5. *Purja* (caste genealogies) on migration from the place of origin and then migration to many parts of India.

Epic Narratives

1. *Chital Singh Chhatri*; an oral epic widely popular among the Parghanias and the old men.

    One such *Purja* collected from Sri Parsuram Majhi, Malpada, Sinapali Block in Kalahandi district reflects the nature of its structure, narration, and

function of the *Purja*. This *Purja* reveals how the Gonds came from Bastar and Chhatishgarh to Kalahandi. The contents of the *Purja* are:

i. Distribution of the Gond gods and goddesses in the Gond administrative territories. Kinship relationships among the Gond gods and goddesses, distribution of land and place (*Gadi*), worship of the gods and goddesses by the Gonds according to their clan. Categories of food, dresses, and offerings given to the Gond gods and goddesses according to their individual tastes.

ii. Ethnic status of the Gonds: The superior Gonds and inferior Gonds in terms of their origin and occupation are described. Out of eight *Saga* Gonds, the Markam and the Netam Gonds are superior and the rest are comparatively inferior. The kinship relation is also determined in the *Purja*, and description of permissible marriage alliances among the different Gond clans is found.

iii. The history of clan migration from one place to another and formation of new settlement is found in the *Purja*. The struggle of the Gonds with other tribes during their migration and settlement is also described. They also describe the first progenitor and the first Gond hero, who defeated other tribes and saved their Gond clan.

iv. Inorder to preserve the chronology in caste genealogy, the time factor is retained through the series of important events. For instance, the events of the Gond heroes are remembered by the Parghanias and it is through an association of the events that the chronology of the Gond oral history is maintained.

v. Social rules are described in the *Purja*. Most of the Gonds are breast-milk brothers (*Dudbhai*) and marital alliance is not allowed between two *Dudbhai* clans. Therefore, to be aware of the caste status and the approved marriage relation between the Gonds, the *Purja* is referred.

vi. Unless and until the caste genealogies are agreed on and declared as correct, the narrations of the Parghanias are sometimes rejected. The *sianlog* suggest to the Parghania to correct the narrative events, so that the correct oral history and chronology will be maintained.

Earlier, the Parghanias went to their patron's village every year. But now, they do not go every year. Their patrons are numerous; the Parghanias have their clan masters.

Case Study

I had a two-day long interview with Sri Lambodar Majhi Parghania of Kirkita village and my interaction with him gave me a clear picture of the function of a Parghania. The

social status, role, and function of a Gond bard in the Gond society were well-knitted in their social system. The Parghanias maintain their self-esteem even though they know that they are not powerful anymore; they have their self-pride. This interview is self-explanatory.

Mahendra K. Mishra

(M.K.M.): How do you earn your livelihood?

Lambodar Majhi

(L.M): I am a *sukhbasi.*

M.K.M.: What is *sukhbasi*?

L.M.: Oh! *Sukhbasi* means, don't you know a proverb, '*Gai nai goru, Sukhenind kari*'.

M.K.M: What does it mean?

L.M.: A man having no cow or bullock sleeps happily. It means I am not a cultivator, I do not have cows. So I sleep happily. I live on my profession.

M.K.M: So how do you earn from your profession?

L.M.: Oh! My *Daata* – my clan master/patron pays me some *dan* and I use it to run my family by moving from one place to another.

M.K.M.: Do you have sufficient income in your profession?

L.M.: No, it is only for three to four months that we live on our patron's donation. He smiled and said, '*Maiji munusar khandek kapta, sei kuluth chepta*'.

M.K.M: I did not understand the riddle.

L.M.: Oh Babu! If we go to a poor man's house (clan master/patron who is poor) and call him to go to the pond and take his bath how will he manage to bathe with his/her single cloth? If he had two cloths, then he could have changed the cloth and given alms. If not, what can he/she do? They give the alms according to their capacity.

M.K.M.: How do they manage to feed you?

L.M.: I take food from their home only, because we both (patron and bard) are one. We belong to the same ancestry. The clan master gave us God to worship and they took up the land and power.

M.K.M.: When do you sing or tell a story?

L.M.: We sing the song in the evening after the dinner. We also narrate the story at night, but it is nonsense. They will serve a meal to a Parghania and run after him day and night to extract the songs and tales.

M.K.M: What does that mean?

L.M.: Unless you are fed well, how can you be satisfied and unless you have a night fire, how can you sing a song? '*Kathi kati ki Bhati Kathi*' - without a fireplace,

I can't sing well. In the night, a fire with a community gathering motivates the singer to perform better.

M.K.M.: How do you go from one place to another?

L.M.: I have a horse. A horse is our symbol. Of course, we don't take bow and arrow; we take *Kikri* while we move around. It is also our symbol.

M.K.M.: Which Gods and Goddess you worship?

L.M.: Budha Deo, Lingadeo, and Junghadeo. Budha Deo is Mahadeo – Shiva. He takes *sukla bhog – satwika* food. But Linga and Janghadeo like blood sacrifice.

M.K.M.: What sort of *Dan* do you get from your patron?

L.M.: Oh that is not *Dan* – it is brother's share. Although we call it *Dan*, it is our share from our elder brother. The *Dan* are, (he sang),

'*Anna dan, Vastra dan Suna dan*
Vaikunthe than.
Rupa dan chandan dan, Chhelidan Chandan ai,
Rahu dan Bhains ai.
Gou dan baikuntha than,
Loh dan purkha umar. Loha dan purkha umar, Luha bagir bajar.
Tin bhata luha, Khorigina, Luha Godan
Tangia for amardan, Kansdan Bansbodha,
Lohadan – Purkha umar.'

Donating rice, clothes, and gold results in a space in heaven,
Donating silver, sandal, and goat is as sacred as sandal,
To get rid of the bad eyes of *Rahu*, a buffalo is donated
Donating a cow results in a place in heaven
For longevity of life, iron is donated - for age to be as strong as iron
Three measures of iron, brass utensils, donating a cow.
Axe for immortality, brass utensils for progeny,
Donating iron for the longevity of the old people.'

M.K.M.: Can the patron give you all these alms?

L.M: Rich men can give it. But how can the poor afford it?

M.K.M: What narratives do you sing?

L.M.: *Purja*, Mahadeo Parvati – *Chasa nirnaya* (Paddy cultivation), *Hirakhan chhatri, Chital Singh Chhatri.*

M.K.M: As a Parghania, how are you different from the others?

L.M.: I am a Parghania. I am always sacred. The kind of Parghanias you will find in our region are Gond Kul.

First name is *Patkinari*. The first Gond sat on the throne (*Patachhatra*).

The Parghania who sat on the throne with the King is called *Patkinari.*

The Parghania who sat in others' house is known as *Bisi.*

The bard who moved from one house to another is known as Parghania.

M.K.M.: Does the Parghania go to the houses of other castes?

L.M.: No, only to the Gonds. We do not go to Gaur, Brahmin, Teli, Mali, Keut, or Kumhar; we do not take food in 80 *kuli* of castes. We do not play our *Vana* in these houses.

M.K.M.: Where did you get your Vana?

L.M.: We got this Vana from our Gond patron. They gave us the Gond God. Do you know, we are Gond bards? But we also have our bard. They are called Mana. Their Vana is *taila*. The Linga God is installed in *tainla*.The songs the Mana used to sing in Gondi language are *Ero rela rela je, ero rela rela* etc.

M.K.M.: What is your specialty?

L.M.: We are *Amar* (immortal). We walk on fire – we know *agnisham* mantra so I can stay in water for 12 hours and no cold can harm me. I can hit myself with an axe and it will not wound me. (On my request, Lambodhar Majhi brought an edged axe from the nearby house and placed it on his chest and hit the axe with a stone. Surprisingly, it did not wound him).

M.K.M.: In which villages do you have your Parghania tradition?

L.M.: We have Parghania tradition and Gond clan masters in the following villages:

Marei Gond in Kankri and Ankapur villages; Markam Gond in Sinapali, Boden and Gatibeda villages; Netam Gond in Badi village and Dharam sagar; Koiba in Phulimunda, Sirli, Inda villages; and Parghania in Dhorra village.

M.K.M.: Can we listen to some of your songs?

L.M.: Unless I pick up my weapon how can I sing?

M.K.M.: What weapon?

L.M.: If you fix a plough with bullocks, it will not run unless you make some sounds. Similarly, you have to create some sounds to stimulate us to sing the songs.

M.K.M: Thank you very much for your kind conversation.

L.M.: *Juhar.*

The Boguas and the Marals among the Kondhs, and the Ghogia among the Gaurs also have similar experience and characteristics. They also equally spell out their glory and say that they are endowed with supernatural powers.

The Marals and Boguas have their origin myths. They are said to be the son of Siva or Mahadeo. They claim that they are the first son of God and therefore sing his glory. They also claim that Lord Siva offered them the musical instrument, 16 *dambaru* (musical instrument used by Siva).

The changing social order and occupation among the Gonds and the Kondhs have changed their worldview. This is a stage when the educated tribes are not able to understand their cultural values and maybe, beyond a stage, would seek their cultural roots through these singers and oral traditions. The present collection, therefore, is a transition from oral to written text of some epics in Kalahandi, which can be shown as an initiation to enter into the cultural domain of the epic texts and performance. Very few people are aware of this genre for it to be restored for posterity. Once this awareness is created among the tribal people, they will restore it.

Maral and Bogua

The Kondh tribe is one of the dominant communities in South-eastern Orissa. Kalahandi is known as the Kondhandesh (Kondhistan) for accommodating a majority of the Kondh population in the district. The whole of Kalahandi was divided into six *chaks* (territories or circles) by the Kondhs. The Kondhs were the landowners and had great power inorder to exercise their village autonomy. They had a glorious caste history of migration from the South to Kalahandi. This early migration and settlement is described in the creation myths of the Kondhs and their settlement in Kondhandesh. Their struggle for survival as the first food gatherers and subsequently food producers, and struggle with other caste enemies are found in their caste genealogies.

Because there was no written tradition, the Kondhs were memorizing their caste glory through some remarkable events, characters, and places of significance. For this memorization and perpetuation of the esoteric caste knowledge, each and every Kondh clan had their clan bards. They are called Maral and Bogua. They are offshoots of the Kondh tribe. They earn their livelihood by singing songs, caste genealogies, and visiting their *data*'s house (alms givers). Except their clan *data* they do not go to any other's house for alms. The Maral and Bogua women tattoo the bodies of Kondh girls. The two bard communities have divided their land into many clan areas called Kondh *chak* (Kondh clan territories).

The Maral and the Boguas live in Bolangir and Kalahandi districts. Their number is very small, and they are fast-vanishing professional singers. They are very poor, and now, they earn their livelihood as wage labour and agriculturist. They perform on religious and social occasions.

The Boguas and the Maral sing the sacred narratives – *Gova Utra, Bhima Sidi, Janam Khena Puran.* Other than these, they sing many heroic songs and social events that are dedicated to their Kondh culture.

Each and every caste bard also recites their caste origin by connecting their origin to an ancient sage of the Vedic period, or even the lineage from the gods and goddesses. The Marals identify themselves with the swan—the bird and the seat of Goddess Saraswati—goddess of learning.

At present, the Marals and Boguas have abandoned their caste profession and the current generation are no more interested in epic singing. The older persons remember

the remaining stock of myth and epics as blurred and fragmented stories, which need reconstruction to get a complete story.

Debgunia

The word Debgunia is derived from the word *Deva* – God and *Guna* – quality; literally the meaning of Debgunia is the person who has acquired the quality of the Gods. It is also possible that because the Debgunias sing the *guna* – quality of the gods and goddesses, they are known as Debgunia. They claim that they are the descendants of Devaguru Vrihaspati – the God of wisdom and knowledge.

The Debgunias are a caste group found in that part of Kalahandi adjoining Bolangir. They sing the creation myth – *Vrambanda Puran* – the origin myth of the Universe in which the creation of the earth from the deluge, creation of earth and nature, creation of man and woman, and ultimately cultivation of paddy etc. are narrated in the epic. The Debgunias identify themselves as the worshippers of Goddess Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, and narrate two episodes: the birth of Lakshmi starting from the great churning of the ocean and Lakshmi's association with Lord Jagannath.

Interestingly, the Debgunias are found only in Kalahandi and their major profession is preaching the glory of Goddess Lakshmi. They go from one house to another to beg paddy and in turn offer knowledge on Goddess Lakshmi. In the month of *Margasira* (January), the Debgunias prepare paddy craft and sell these to the farmers. Images of Lord Jagannath, Valabhadra, Subhadra, Goddess Lakshmi, twin elephants, the vehicle of Lakshmi, two winnowing fans, and the Vimana- the seat for installing the deities are crafted using paddy. The women from the farmer community purchase the paddy craft and install them in the worship place in their house. It is believed that by listening to *Lakshmi puran* wealth remains plenty in the house. People believe paddy to be equal to goddess Lakshmi. The Debgunias distribute the paddy craft to the household and after harvest the latter give alms to the Debgunias.

The Debgunias write the myths and epics dedicated to Goddess Lakshmi on palm-leaf manuscripts and offer them to the village headman and the people interested in purchasing them. When somebody in the village purchases the manuscript, he institutes a *puja* (worship to the sacred manuscript) and brings it into his house with all austerity. He also worships the Debguru and the sacred manuscript with devotion. The Debguru is given a cow, gold, paddy for a year, clothes, and many other things for his contribution to the institutionalization of knowledge in the jajman's house (jajman – people who conduct worship).

The Debgunia plays a local harp *Vrahmaveena* – a one-stringed musical instrument that resonates the *mandradhwani*. The singer sings the mythical epic with the harp in accompaniment and goes from door to door begging.

In addition, the Debgunia plays the role of an astrologer and compare the horoscopes during marriage proposals.

Notes and References

[1] Haimendorf, Chritoph Von Furer, (1979) *The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh,* Bikash Publishing House: Delhi: p-153.

[2] In fact, there are no such epics as secular but to distinguish the sacred epics from the other this term has been used here.

Appendix to Chapter 3

Names and Addresses of Singer of Oral Epics

Primary Sources:

Name of the Singer:	Age	Village	Block
Gond Oral Epics:			
Creation Myth, Bisa Majhi	76	Bharuamunda	Sinapali
Chital Singh Chhatri: Khaga Majhi	70	Talpadar	Sinapali
Kondh Oral Epics:			
Gova Utra-I and II, Paramananda Majhi	68	Doto	Boden
Bhima Sidi: Gurubaru Parghania,	78	Chheliamal	Bhawanipatna
Nangmati Rajaphulia, Gurubaru Parghania,		Chheliamal	
Manduka Majhi: Sukru Jani	40	Dom Karlakot	M Rampur
Kamar Oral Epics:			
Kamar Origin Myth: Lala paharia	56	Babebir	Boden
Lakshmi Epic: Lala Paharia	65	Kenduguda	Sinapali
Gandhu Paradhia: Sambaru Paharia	59	Katphar	Boden
Kachhra Dhurua Diga Chinda	68	Khalna	
Bhunjia Oral Epics:			
Origin of Goddess Sunadi: Gandaram Majhi	67	Sunabeda	Komna
Origin myth of Sunadi Bijaya Jhankar	59	Sunabeda	Komna
Bhunjia Origin: Diga Chinda	68	Khalna	Sinapali
Mandhar Raja: Rajasingh Majhi	63	Gatibeda	Komna
Tulsiveer: Gandaram Majhi Sunabeda,			
Allah Udal, Kachhra Dhurua, Raja Singh Majhi		Sunabeda	Komna
Banjara Oral Epic:			
Raja Isalu: Hatia Banjara,	73	Koksara	Koksara
Ramji Huna Sati: Sadgar Banjara		Golamunda	Golamunda
Hiro Diwani: Sambhu Banjara	45	Bramhniguda	Sinapali
Gaur Oral Epic:			
Kotrabaina Ramela: Bhajan Nial	70	Kapsi	Sinapali
Kharatmal: Siba bag	72	Sinapali	Sinapali,
Madhab Rupmati: Ghanashyam Gaud	70	Matuelguda	Kalampur
Rupadhar Hirandri: Bhaaainra Punji	70	Chicher	Khariar
Debgunia Epic:			
Janam Khand Puran: Paramanda Debaguru	58	Ghaintguda	
Parasuram Devguru		Chindaguda	Khariar
Literary Epic:			
Drought Song: Manohar Meher, Bedamati Devi		Boden	Sinapali
Kondhmeli Song: Kamal Charan Kamapal Suna		Bhawanipatna	Kalahandi
Hatidhara Geet written by Maghavan Mallick		Khariar	

Interview:

The priest, singers, and resourceful informants met in course of the study
Sri Duryodhan Majhi, MLA, Khariar. He is a rich depository of Gond social History.
Bhima Majhi, Silhari Bahara, Nuapada
Chitrasen Bhoi, Gauntia (Chief), Hatibandha, Sinapali
Umashankar Kar, Historian and a columnist, mandarbag pada, Bhawanipatna
Banamali Majhi, Ladugaon, Koksara
Uttam Kumar Pradhan, Utkela, Kesinga, Kalahandi
Dr Dolagobinda Bisi, Researcher, Titilagarh, Bolangir
Dr Anjali Padhi, Khariar
Purusittam Singh Majhi, President ASGP, Sinapali
Bhagabana Majhi, Vice President ASGP, Sinapali
Arkhit Bhoi, Bargaon,
Bonjo Majhi, Pendraban
Bhima Majhi, Silharibahara, Nuapada

Secondary Sources:

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Prahalad Dube: Writer of Jaya Chandrika in 17th century who was a court poet of Sarangarh

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Sri Mohit Mohan Mahapatra	Eminent Littérateur	Khariar
Late Prayag Dutta Joshi	Eminent Linguist on Koshali Language and a Scholar of Culture	Khariar
Gova myth	Creation Myth	Origin myths of the tribals:
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Personal contact with the singers:

Bonjo Majhi, Pendravan
Bansidhar Bisi, Jadamuda, Komna
Lambodar Bisi, Khariar
Parsuram Majhi, Malpada, (for the Caste Genealogy of the Gonds)
Nilambar Majih, Umrah (Village headman) Singjhar, Kalahandi

Chapter 4

Oral Epics of Kalahandi

It is the text that validates the purpose of performance and the context, and signifies the meaning of the text. The text may be an oral song or a ritual object. This chapter presents the oral epic text ethnicity-wise inorder to provide a vivid description of the epic and to understand its meaning.

The order of the presentation is as follows:

5. Gond Oral Epics
6. Kondh Oral Epics and Kondh Rebellion
7. Kamar Oral Epics
8. Bhunjia Oral Epics
9. Banjara Oral Epic
10. Gaur Oral Epic
11. Debgunia Creation Myth (*Lakshmi Janam Puran*)
12. Drought Songs

Chapter 5

Gond Oral Epics

The Gonds are the dominant tribal community in Central India. They have a glorious history from the ninth to the nineteenth century. Gondwana land was known to be the abode of the Gond kings. Their supremacy over Central India, challenging the Mughals and also the British at different periods of time and in different places, is found narrated in their oral histories and folklore.[1] The Gonds are distributed over Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Orissa, and Jharkhand. According to the Census of 1971, the Gond population was 51,54,536.[2]

The Gond community thickly populates western Orissa adjoining Chhatishgarh and the Bastar region. They speak Gondi, a language belonging to the Dravidian language group. However, the Gonds of Orissa have adopted the local Oriya language, and Gondi words are found only in their kinship terms and religious texts. Although they have changed their language, they maintain their customs and traditions. They trace their ancestry from Gondwana land.

Gonds in Orissa form the second major tribal group in terms of population. Their population is 7,01,139 according to the Census of India in 1991. Majority of them live in Kalahandi (1,72,686), Sambalpur (1,35,435), Koraput (1,26,526), and Bolangir (93,331).[3] In Orissa, they identify their ancestry with the four *saga(s)* (clan), six *saga(s)*, seven *saga(s)* and eight *saga(s)* Gonds. Kalahandi, Koraput, and Sambalpur are three major districts that support substantial Gond population. They are the landowners in many principalities of Central India and western Orissa. In Chhatishgarh there were many Gond kings during the pre-British period. Western Orissa consisted of 18 *garhs* (kingdom) of which ten *garhs* belonged to the Gonds. During the medieval period (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Century), a number of Gond kingdoms flourished in Central India. Thus, the Gonds have a glorious history of their rule in Central India adjoining western Orissa.

The kings belonging to the Kshatriya lineage overthrew the Gond land owners and established their reign. The Gond proverb *Gondarje bhuin, aru rajar je raij* means 'the land belongs to the Gonds and the administration to the King'. The Gonds in Central India were known as Raj Gonds. They married the daughters of the Kshatriya kings. They had their own clan genealogists and bards known as Parghania (derived from *Parghana* – the administrative territory consisting of 84 villages) to maintain accounts of

their lineage and genealogies. Their eight *garhs* as narrated in their mythical accounts are as follows: Garh Mandala, Chanda, Lanjigarh, Chhotanagpur, Luhagarh, Dhamdagarh, Biratgarh, and Hiragarh. Distribution of gods, totems, ancestors, clan names, and the abodes of the deity are found in their mythical accounts. Parghania, the Gond singers, sing the chronological history of the eight *saga* clans of Gonds.

In Kalahandi, Gond myths, caste genealogies, and oral epics are found among the old priests and singers. Variants of mythical accounts are available according to their clan distribution. The Parghanias recite two kinds of songs: one is the mythical narrative on the creation of earth and the origin of man and the other epic on cultural heroes of the Gonds such as Hirakhan and Chital Singh Chhatri.

Gond Origin Myth

The Parghania, the Gond bard, performs the Gond creation myth throughout Kalahandi and Chhatishgarh. The Gondwana region was ruled by the Gond kingdom from the ninth to the sixteenth century A.D. There were eight forts of Gondwana of which western Orissa is a part. Of the 18 *garhs* in western Orissa, the Gond kings ruled ten *garhs*. The creation myth of the Gonds that is accompanied by the *Kikri* is of religious significance. This myth is found in Garha-Mandala region of Madhya Pradesh. In eastern Kalahandi (modern Nuapada district) the Gonds, though have lost their Gondi language, share the cultural practices of that of the Central Indian Gonds Many variations are found in the Gond creation myth.

Budha Deo Myth (From Gond Genealogy)

Budha Deo is the first progenitor of the Gonds.

Budha Deo, the Gond God, took his *sankha*, *padma*, *Gada* and *chakra*, widened his furious tongue and killed the demon in the ocean. The demon's bones turned into mountains, ribs became *chimta* and his blood turned into red sandal.

Budha Deo took his weapons (stick) from the tree and went to Gudagarh, a mountain, and settled there. He levelled four lands: Sunabeda, Rupabeda, Changurbeda, and Mangurbeda and he started cultivation there. He harvested the paddy and got three *puda* of paddy. The first harvest was *setka* (paddy that appears within 60 days), second was *Kalia* and third was *malpa*. God (Budha Deo) took this paddy and distributed it among mankind to initiate their own cultivation.

All the Gods lived in the Gudagarh mountain (Sunabeda plateau). They descended from the mountain to Sakhatora village and performed *sakkhsvhaka*. In the village Bhogdihi-Darlipada, 240 warriors conducted the marriage ceremony of Lord Budha Deo. Budha Deo brought turmeric and married Dharnimata (goddess mother earth). He appeased his divine guests by giving them a feast of a sixteen-horned sheep (cock). Ganga Dei[4] perched rice in this marriage. Budha Deo took rest in Painripani village, where he left his *Painri*. Hence, the village was named Painripani after that.

Budha Deo went to another place and took rest. He kept the cooking *chatu* and the place was known as Chatuanka village. He also put *khoger* near Kharkamati village

(presently Ampani village of Kalahandi). In Khomtia Raij (eastern Kalahandi) he killed the Kutia Kondhs. Goddess Khamkhai (goddess worshipped in a pillar) was worshipped. Then he went to Keusing (Kesinga town of Kalahandi), after wearing his heroic dress, and then went to River Ganga for a pilgrimage and returned. After coming back from ganga he arranged a feast on the second full-moon day of Ashadha (July).[5]

Gond Creation Myth (SunabedaVersion)

The universe was full of water. Mahadeo, the first supreme god, wanted to create earth. He created a crow from the dirt of his body and sent him to fetch earth. The crow, on the way to fetch earth, met a *kakra*. The crow took the help of an earthworm and brought the earth from the nether region. Mahadeo divided the earth into seven parts and placed them on seven *purun patar* and threw them into the ocean. Seven islands were created in the world. Mahadeo ordered Bhima to test whether the liquid earth had solidified. Bhima put his foot on the earth and his leg sank. Mahadeo knew that the earth was still in a liquid state. The mud, which sprang up from the footsteps of Bhima became the mountains. Mahadeo created seven kinds of herbs. He gave the first six herbs to Parvati, his wife, and denied her the seventh herb.

Then Mahadeo went to Kadalijharia to make a wooden plough. Kadalijharia is a forest with abundant water sources with banana trees and many herbal plants. Bhima followed him. Parvati, in the absence of Mahadeo, ate the seventh herb out of curiosity and became pregnant. On becoming pregnant, she became afraid. As a remedy, she created a tiger from the dirt of her body and sent the tiger to meet Mahadeo. The tiger went to Kadalijharia and hid in a bush and tried to frighten Mahadeo. So, Mahadeo threw some wooden parts of the plough and said, 'Oh *Kokua*, chase the tiger and eat him'.

The wooden particles turned into *kokua* and chased the tiger. The tiger ran to Parvati for refuge. At that time, Parvati was washing utensils. The tiger entered the house and the *kokua* also tried to enter the house. Parvati caught hold of the face of the *kokua* with her hands which had black ashes, and the *kokua*'s face turned black.

People believe that tigers are afraid of *kokua*s. It is believed that if a tiger steps on the place where a kokua has urinated, it will become blind. So, the tiger smells the earth and steps carefully.

Mahadeo knew that Parvati was pregnant. He went to *Nirakar* and narrated the events. *Nirakar* said, 'if Parvati does not become pregnant, then how will creation be possible? How can we perpetuate the progeny?' Mahadeo came to Parvati. Meanwhile, she had given birth to thousands of children, both handsome and ugly. Out of shame, she buried the ugly children under the trees and brought the handsome children up on her lap. Mahadeo divided the children into many clans, castes etc. The first son of Parvati and Mahadeo was the Gond. The Gond lived on fruits and roots. They wanted food from Parvati. But it was not possible for her to feed them with breast milk. Mahadeo tried to find a permanent solution for food. So Mahadeo planned to teach the Gonds cultivation for their livelihood.

Mahadeo started cultivation on Sunabeda plateau. He levelled the land and prepared four fields: Sunabeda, Rupabeda, Changurbeda, and Mangurbeda. He engaged Janra and Manika to plough and level the field; Bhima helped him as a ploughman. The field was levelled. Mahadeo searched for paddy. He thought of getting it from Kuvera, the god of wealth.

Mahadeo sent Bhima (his servant) to Kuvera. Bhima borrowed paddy from Kuvera and promised to repay double the quantity of seeds after harvest. Then Mahadeo sowed the paddy in the field. He ordered Bhima to prepare the threshing floor and to cut the paddy and bring it to the threshing floor. He got a rich harvest. After harvesting, Mahadeo asked Bhima, 'how much paddy did you reap?' to which Bhima replied, 'two-and-half *unga*'. Mahadeo thought that the paddy was too little even to repay Kuvera. Out of anger, he ordered Bhima to set fire to the paddy. Bhima unwittingly burnt the paddy. The flame and smoke covered the nether region and heaven.

Brahma, Vishnu, Vasuki, Indra, and the other gods arrived at Sunabeda to look into the matter. They knew that the amount of paddy assumed by Bhima as two-and-half *unga* was in fact more than sufficient for Mahadeo to repay Kuvera. Without knowing this, he had set fire to it. The gods extinguished the fire and saved the remaining from the heap of the half-burnt paddy. The rescued paddy was named according to their colour such as *kalia, setka, pora, chinger, sapuri, gelei, kalikhuji, maharaji, puagi, hiran, ladel, kalakrushna, sul, lalkain, jal chinger, chinisakar, bahal mijo, sankari, lalat,* and *puagi.* Mahadeo started cultivation again. Since then, the Gonds learnt cultivation. The Gonds believe that the Sunabeda plateau was the first place on earth where paddy was cultivated.

Gond Origin Myth (Chhatishgarh Version)

'Of the many tribal legends of Central India', writes Naik, 'Regarding the creation of the world, this one from the Gonds of Mandla is interesting.'

> At the beginning there was nothing but water. On its surface floated a lotus flower on which sat Mahadeo. When he saw nothing but water, he made a crow from the dirt of his body and sent it to find earth. The crow flew and flew till it came to rest on the claw of the great crab, Kakramal Kshattri. When the crow said "Kao", the crab exclaimed, "At last after many days I have got something to eat." The crow replied, "Uncle, my father has sent me to you." The crab said. "Nephew, why have you come? Tell me quickly." The crow replied, "My father has sent me to get earth to make the world."
>
> Then the two of them went to Singardip. Nal Raja and Nal Rani had the earth. After searching for a long time the aunt and uncle and asked for some earth as a loan. They promised to give it and said, "Take some food and then go your way." Nal Rani prepared poison for the guests. When they had eaten, they became drunk and then unconscious. When they saw them safely asleep, Nal Raja and Nal Rani stole the earth and prepared to run away. But the crab awoke and caught them in its claws and squeeze the earth out of their mouths and gave it to the crow.
>
> Then the crow took the earth to Mahadeo. Mahadeo made seven leaf-cups of lotus leaves and put a little earth in each. He stirred it up in each cup and called

for Makramal Kshattri. He said to her, "Now spin your web over the face of the sea." The spider prepared her web and Mahadeo put the seven cups of earth upon it and fanned them with a lotus leaf. With the breeze of his fanning, the earth was carried over the web and the seven kinds of earth were prepared—the black earth, the red earth, the milk earth, the barren earth, the gravel earth, virgin earth, and swampy earth.

When every thing was ready, Mahadeo said to Bhimsen, "I have made the earth, but I do not know whether it is solid or not." Bhimsen was pleased and said, "I will come and look," As he went, his feet sunk into the earth. But he lay down on the ground and rolled about, thus making the mountains.

Pradhan, bards of the Gonds, are great storytellers. About the origin of man they say that while the world was forming, setting like curds on the face of the water, the wind blew from the east and the world began to form towards the west. Then the wind changed and it formed to the east.

Then Mahadeo was born. He sowed seven kinds of herb seed in seven seed-beds. The first was the sweet herb; the second was the herb that stays hunger; the third was the herb that makes one happy; the fourth was the herb that brings one all the news; the fifth was the herb that if one eats it and then rubs a little dirt from one's body and makes something, that thing will live; the sixth was a sorrow-giving herb, and the seventh herb gave children.

After the herbs had been sown, the earth was still quaking and trembling. Mahadeo said to Parvati, "I am going to drive nails into the earth. You can eat all the herbs except the seventh; don't eat that." He took a gold adze with a sliver and went to Kajliban Pahar. There he cut a sandalwood tree, made nails of the wood and fixed the earth in place.

But Parvati thought and thought. Why did he tell me not to eat the herbs in the seventh seed? At last she could not suppress her desire and ate. She was pregnant at once. She knew that Mahadeo was in Kajliban driving nails of sandalwood into the earth. She wanted to call him, but could not. She ate the fifth kind of herb, made a tiger from the dirt of her body, and told it, "From today you are king of the jungle. Go to Mahadeo; hide behind the trees and frighten him home."

The tiger went to Mahadeo and he threw some of the shaving of his nails at it. They turned into wild dogs and drove it away. But Mahadeo went home to see what was the matter. When he saw that Parvati was pregnant. He went to Bhagavan and said, "Why did you let her become pregnant?" Bhagavan said, "Unless she is pregnant how can we populate the world with human being?"

Parvati gave birth to many children in time. She felt ashamed to be bearing so many children at once and buried the babies under different trees. The best of the boys she kept; Mahadeo saw him and was pleased. But he said, "What have you done with the others?" So Parvati brought the others out. Mahadeo gave them names and divided them into tribes and clans, and arranged their marriages.

At the time of the Rama-Rawan war, a Gond and Gondin lived together in the thick jungle in the territory of Rawan. Mahadeo cursed those Gonds and said. "Until Rama comes to Lanka and you wash his feet and drink the water, you will have no children."

So when Rama went to Lanka, he met that Gond and Godin and they washed his feet and drank the water. He gave them this blessing: "You will be Rawanbansi Gond and you will have three sons whose names will be Alko, Talko and Korcho." Then Rama killed all the demons.

Rama saved the Gonds who went over to his side. When Rama returned from Lanka he brought them to the other Gonds who were living in the thick jungle. These were Surajbansi Raj Gond and they had five sons, Partti, Markam, Maravi, Dhurwa, and Bhagadiya. The Rawanbansi and the Surajbansi lived together as brothers.

Rawan had lost his glory and his honour; he turned into Bara Deo. To Parteti he gave a dream, "Bara Deo will be born from both Rawanbansi and Surajbansi. Make a platform of mud and erect a pillar for him." Parteti told the others his dream as they made a pillar. Then Bara Deo was born.

They agreed that the youngest brother should have a "bana" and should worship Bara Deo, while the eldest should sit on the throne as Raja. Such was the order of Bara Deo. When the youngest boy, Bhagadiya, danced and played before Bara Deo. Parteti gave him many presents—cattle, gold and silver. He said to him "From today you will be our Parghania. We will give you Sukdan and when any of us die you will have your share.[5]" (Naik, T.B. 1973:138-141)

Oral Epic

Chital Singh Chhatri

There was a kingdom in which an old man lived; he had seven sons. The old man's name was Sadhe Budha and the names of his sons were Bhubana Singh, Hema Singh, Samar Singh, Gagana Singh, Dhuma Singh, Kurra Singh, and Chital Singh. The first six brothers were married except the last one, Chital Singh. He did not do any work; and was sitting idle. Sometimes, he played dice with gods.

One day, the old man called all his seven sons to his presence and said, 'Your days will not go like this. If you sit idle and eat, even the sand of the river will also be finished. You have landed property, so you better start cultivation.' The seven brothers sat together and discussed. They decided to cultivate the land and grow paddy.

The next morning, all of them went in search of ploughmen. Each brother fetched one ploughman for himself and returned home. But Chital Singh brought two ploughmen. They arranged the plough and bullocks for cultivation and started levelling the land. The elder brother told Chital, 'Chital, you graze one *puti* cattle in this field, we will level the land'.

Chital took the cattle to the jungle to graze. He brought some grass and gave it to the cattle. The cows filled their belly, but alas! The grass was plenty and one day, the cattle got dispersed. They were running here and there. Chital took all of them to his cowshed. He called all his elder sisters-in-law to feed the cattle. They fed the cattle with husk, water, and rice water. This practice continued. Everyday, the six sisters-in-law cleaned the huge quantity of cow dung. They could not cook food because they were engaged in the cowshed. They also looked weak because of the heavy workload in the cowshed. Dung was heaped in front of the cowshed. The sisters-in-law were worried.

One day the sisters-in-law complained and asked their husbands how much longer they would have to clean the heap of cow dung in the cowshed. They were looking weak.

Hearing this, the eldest brother called Chital Singh and said, 'Babu Chital, tomorrow you will come to the field with fourteen *lada*, fourteen *Pika*, fourteen sets of tobacco leaf, and food for fourteen persons'.

Chital Singh said, '*Dada*, how can I take these many items in my hands. I am alone. It is impossible.' But his elder brother did not listen to anything. He said, 'I do not know, but you have to come with all these things, or else I will punish you.'

The next day, Chital managed to graze the cattle. After that, he collected food, tobacco, *lada*, tobacco leaf in a bag, invoked his goddess and started towards the field. The six brothers were waiting for Chital Singh. They saw Chital coming with a single bag. They were angry. But when Chital gave the bag to them, they were astonished at how he could bring all the food and tobacco in a single bag. They thought Chital Singh was a *Chhatri*—hero. He was a boy with magical powers. The elder brother said, 'One day he may take away our land. If we bury him in the earth, the earth will give ample paddy and the wall of the land (*hida*) will not break.'

Kurra Singh, the sixth brother said, 'Oh brothers, it is said "*gharke gutek aru sal ke Patek*" (One capable man in a house and one bullock in the field are required). So let's not kill him.' But the five elder brothers did not listen to Kurra Singh and said, 'you will not say anything. Or we will put you also to death.'

Then, the five elder brothers called Chital Singh to the field to level the earth. They levelled the land in such a way that two heaps of soil were made and between which there was a trench. The five elder brothers ordered Chital to enter into the trench to level it. When Chital entered into the trench, the brothers buried him with the heaps of soil from both sides. Chital Singh, before he could realize anything, was buried in the soil and he died.

Then the six brothers returned home with the decision that they would not reveal the fact. Instead, they decided that if asked, they would say that Chital had gone to his sister's house.

Kurra Singh, the sixth brother wept for Chital Singh. When they returned home the elder sisters-in-law asked, 'Where is Chital Singh?' They said, 'Chital has gone to his sister's house.'

At night, Kurra Singh told his wife that the five elder brothers had buried Chital in the field. The elder brothers did not want to share the land with the young brother. They also buried him to satisfy the earth for ample harvest. The couple felt sorry for Chital, but out of fear for the five elders they remained silent.

Meanwhile, Mahapru (supreme God) found that Chital Singh had not been coming to graze the cattle. Mahapru used to play dice with Chital everyday. He knew that Chital Singh's elder brothers had buried him.

Mahapru asked Indra, the rain God, to pour water on the heap of soil in the field where Chital was buried. Indra poured water in such a way that all the land levelled by the brothers was washed out. God rescued Chital Singh and said, 'You were playing dice (sometimes cards) with me. How can I play without you? Get up, Chital Singh.' Chital got up as if he was waking up from a long sleep. He narrated the happenings to God. Then God said, 'Chital, you better go home and if asked, reply that you had been to your sister's house.' Chital returned home.

The sisters-in-law asked him, 'where had you been?' and Chital replied, 'To my sister's house'. Only the sixth sister-in-law knew that Chital had been buried, but she did not say anything. Chital said, 'I am hungry, I will take food from my younger sister-in-law.'

Chital Singh asked his younger sister-in-law (wife of Kurra Singh, the sixth brother) for some rice. After getting rice, he went to his clan goddess who was worshipped in a *gudi*. The *gudi* had also been neglected and was far away from the village.

Chital Singh came to the *gudi* and invoked her.

'Oh my mother Danteswari,
Khameswari ma,
My Duarsani, Patneswari,
My Budharaja Chaturbhuj.

I am facing such a disaster, punishment
Oh gods and goddesses,
Tell me a way to get rid of it.
Oh my long-haired, short-stature gods
One to whom I am praying
Listen to my prayer
I will offer buffalo to the buffalo-eater.
I will offer human to the human-eater
I will sacrifice hen to the hen-eater
I will offer cock,
I will offer sheep,
I will offer ewe to the gods.
I will offer whatever the gods like to eat.'

He invoked all the gods and goddesses. The gods and goddesses become happy with Chital Singh and said,

'Oh babu Chital,
We understand
You find a way,
Would you be able to offer all these sacrifices?
To all the gods and goddess
We liked our choice.'

Chital Singh replied, 'I will offer all these sacrifices to each and every deity.' He offered all the sacrifices. Everybody was satisfied except goddess Patmisri. Chital invoked her repeatedly. Patmisri said, 'if you can bring the recently married women of the village to come to my *gudi* (worship hut) and wash the worship hut with red soil, I will be happy and I would grant you the boons you like. I want a *ningiala bhuasen* (recently married women)'. Chital Singh went to the village. He called eight to ten women to the *gudi* and requested them to paint red soil on the wall. The next day ten women, after having bath, came with *rata mati* (red soil) to wash the *gudi* and paint the wall.

Chital Singh, said, 'Oh mother Goddess Patmisri, I have brought the women of your choice. Now, it is your turn to choose your prey.' Goddess Patmisri was pleased with him. She ate the offerings given to her. She was happy to get human offerings.

She said,

'Oh Babu Chital Singh,
You tie up your turban (*pagdi*)
You wear up the *Dhoti*,
Prepared by your ancestors.
If you like to fly you can, on the sky
I will make you fly to that height.
Wear your *dhoti* and *pagdi*,
The way you go will be yours.
I am giving you a white horse and a *patkhanda* (sword)
Go and win the world.'

Chital Singh went to his sisters-in-law and said,

'*Juhar bale juhar bahu* (sisters-in-law)
Juhar, juhar, Juhar (respect to you)
I am leaving my home
Going to a far-off place
I will return after twenty- four years.
Allow me to go.'

The sisters-in-laws said,

'Oh our brother-in-law, Chital Babu,
Where are you going?
Where do you go?
Why are you angry with your elder brothers?
How can we live without you?
How do we live without caring for you?'

Chital Singh took the ancestral dress and after paying *juhar* set out on his journey.

Before starting, he went to his elder brother Gagana Singh and said, 'I am leaving this house. But when I come back, I will sacrifice you and offer your head to my clan goddess.'

Sadhe Budha, Chital's father, tried to convince his son. He tried to fix his marriage with a beautiful girl of an *dhuniraksen*. But, Chital did not listen to his father. He went away.

Chital started his journey. He went and went and went. On the way, he saw a man who was making a rope out of dust. Surprisingly, a heap of dust was turning into a heap of rope. Chital understood that the man must be a warrior and he must have some miraculous power. So Chital called him:

'Oh *Mahaprasad*,
How nicely you are making rope out of dust,
I have seen people making rope out of cotton,
I have seen people making rope out of straw.
Alas, you are making rope out of dust; you are a supernatural man,
Gods and goddesses have
Given you miraculous power,
I want to be a friend of yours.

The young man (*Bentmaru*) said, once you honoured me as *Mahaprasad*, 'it means I have become your friend.' When Chital Singh narrated the purpose of his journey, his friend said,

'I am there to help you as a friend,
I will go with you and help you.'

Then, both of them set out on their journey.

On their way, they saw a man who had gathered a heap of crab-bones; the heap was as big as Chaura Dongar (a big mountain in Kalahandi). He assembled the crab-bones and chanted a *mantra*. By the power of the mantra, the crab got back its life and entered into the earth. After sometime, water sprouted from the hole thus, he brought water from the earth.

Chital Singh and his friend *Bentmaru* thought that man to be a potential one to serve purpose when required in future. He could give life to a bone and get water from the earth. He was a miraculous man. So they called him, '*Mahaprasad*, we are happy that you have brought water from the earth by giving life to the crab-bones. You are a hero, we want to be your friend.'

The *Kankaradharu* (second friend) became a friend to Chital Singh and *Bentmaru* (first friend). After hearing of the expedition of Chital Singh, Kankaradharu wanted to join him. The three of them started their journey.

On their way, they came across a river. They saw a miraculous scene. A man had tied a long rope to his waist. He had tied all his cattle to his waist and had crossed the river. Although the river was full of water, the cattle did not drown or get swept away.

The three friends saw how courageous the *Gai-charau*, who tied the cattle to his waist and crossed the river, was. So they called him, '*Mahaprasad*, You are a brave man.'

Hearing this, the cowboy came and said, 'Why do you call me *Mahaprasad*? Who you are all?' The three friends narrated everything. They also praised the way he had crossed the river. The *Gai-charau* also became their friend. Thus, the four friends continued their journey.

On the way, they came across a town. A tiger had been coming to the town often and eating the men. The king of that kingdom had announced *dingra* that if anyone could kill the man-eater tiger and save his subjects, he would offer his daughter Jamumati to the hunter. The four friends were cooking under a tree. They heard this news. They went to a gardener-woman's house and stayed there. In the night, everybody slept inside the house except Chital Singh. He waited to see the man-eater tiger. The tiger came at night.

The tiger found that all the people had closed the doors of their houses and slept except a house where a man was sleeping on a cot with a *antra* burning beside him. The tiger was happy to see the man sleeping outside. He pounced on Chital Singh, who was waiting for the beast. He killed the tiger at once with his sword.

After that, he removed the tooth, nail, and moustache of the tiger and kept them with him and threw away the carcass. Then, he slept as if nothing had happened.

Early in the morning, a *kumbar* was going that way. He found that the man-eater tiger was lying by the roadside. He threw the pots in fear, and out of curiosity, watched whether the tiger was alive or dead. He found that the tiger was dead. Then he shouted, 'I have killed the man-eater tiger, I am the hero. I will marry the princess.' Hearing this, the people assembled and found that the tiger was dead. The people believed that the potter had killed the tiger.

The king, on hearing this, sent his royal elephants to welcome the potter and give him a reward, and his daughter in marriage. The potter was given a royal treatment at the palace.

The next day, the king was about to honour the potter for killing the tiger when Chital Singh and his three friends arrived at the *Durbar*. Chital Singh asked the king.

> '*Hazur*, (My lord)
>
> May I know who has killed the man-eater tiger?'

The king said,

> 'This man, the potter, has killed it.'

Chital asked,

> 'If he has killed the tiger, then order him to show the tooth, nail, and moustache of the dead tiger.'

The king ordered the potter to show these. But he failed to show and was imprisoned.

Then, Chital showed the tooth, nail, and moustache to the king at the *durbar.* People cheered him for his bravery. But Chital Singh did not marry the princess. He arranged the marriage of Janumati with his first friend *Bentmaru* and left them in their kingdom. The remaining three friends continued on their journey, assuring *Bentmaru* and his wife that they would come after 12 years.

The two friends and Chital Singh came to another city. The people of that city were afraid of a huge serpent. They came to know that a *Kalinangen*— a black serpent, was eating the people of the city one by one. The king had announced that the person who would kill the black serpent would marry his only daughter.

Chital Singh heard about it. He went to a gardener-woman's house and stayed there with his friends. On that day, it was the turn of the gardener-woman's son to go to the serpent. Chital Singh went to the *Kali* serpent in the place of the woman's son.

When the serpent was about to eat Chital Singh, he killed the serpent and returned to the gardener's house. The woman knew from Chital Singh that the serpent had been killed. The next day, the people of the city knew that the gardener-woman's son had killed the serpent.

The king came to know about it. He wanted to give his daughter in marriage to the gardener-woman's son.

But, Chital Singh arranged the marriage of the princess with his friend *Gai-charau* (crab-catcher) friend. He said that he would visit him after 12 years. Leaving his friend, Chital resumed his journey.

Chital Singh reached another destination with his friend. They took shelter under a tree where they prepared food and ate. After taking food, Chital left his friend and went to the city. Chital Singh uttered a *mantra* and the water in that city dried up. People did not get even a drop of water to drink; they did not get water to bathe or cook.

The king was puzzled as to how the water in his city had dried up. He called the mendicants, priests, and astrologers to get water through worship. But they failed. Finally, the king announced that anyone who could provide water to his city would marry his only daughter.

People saw that Chital Singh and his friend had water to cook, but they did not. So they told the king about Chital Singh. The king called Chital Singh to his presence. The messenger requested Chital to get water in their ponds, wells, and rivers. Chital Singh inturn wanted nine *puti* rice, six *puti* pulses and 12 sheep. The people of the city arranged for all his demands. He and his friend cooked all these and ate them up in one go. the people were astonished.

Chital Singh said, 'I will bring water to your city. But, on one condition: no one should open the door or window during my activities. No one should try to discover my secret of getting water. If someone watches me, then my knowledge will not work and you will not get water.'

The people agreed to it. Chital Singh and his friend dug at a place with green grass and put a crab on it. They chanted a *mantra.* The crab came to life and entered into the

earth. After sometime, water spouted from the earth and lo! The ponds, wells, and rivers of the city were full of water. The water was so clean and transparent that even if one threw a gold ring in the water, they were able to see it.

All the people were happy. They reported this to the king. As promised, the king was to give his daughter in marriage to the man who brought water. But, Chital Singh arranged the marriage of Kankaradharu with the king's daughter and left the city, assuring them that he would come back after 12 years. Now Chital continued his journey alone.

Chital Singh entered the jungle. The jungle was a deep, dense forest where even the sun rays did not touch the earth. In that jungle, a demon-mother *Dhundi Raksen* was staying with her only beautiful daughter. When Chital Singh arrived at her house, the mother was not at home, but her beautiful daughter was there. Chital Singh asked,

> '*Jue khane dia baile jue khane diani ho.*
> Oh, anybody in the home!
> Please give me a fire.'
> 'Who are you outsider? Where are you from?
> Come inside.
> You come inside and
> Light fire to your cigar.'

He went to the ground floor to light his cigar. The girl called him to the middle floor, but when Chital went to the middle floor, the girl called him to the top floor. Chital Singh went to the top floor and found a beautiful girl sitting there.

> Chital asked, 'Who are you?'
> 'I am the daughter of Dhundi, my mother.'
> 'Who else stays with you?'
> 'My mother.'
> 'Where is she?'
> 'She has gone to get food.'

'She goes to get food once in 12 days. She drinks water of 12 ponds at a time. She will return after 12 days, because she went this morning only.'

The girl was fascinated by Chital Singh and fell in love with him. When the twelfth day came, the girl turned Chital Singh into a small fly, out of the fear that if her mother discovered a human being she would eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Dhundi Raksen, the demon-mother, came. She guessed that the house smelled of the presence of a human. 'Has anybody come here?', she asked. The girl (her daughter) said, 'Oh mother! If you want to eat any human being, there is no one else other than me, who else do you want to find here?'

The demon-mother uprooted a tree and brushed her teeth. When she was sitting, Chital Singh came to the demoness and touched her feet paying reverence. He said,

'I want to marry your daughter.
If you will not say yes
I will not leave your feet.
Allow me to marry her
I like her and she likes me too.'

The demon mother said,

'You have to complete three tests.

First is to get a lotus from the nether region by diving into a pond in the jungle
Second is to make a fire with wood, and
Third one is to hunt a tiger using a single arrow.'

Chital was able to pass the three tests. After that she said,

'Get up my son, You have passed the tests.
I will give my daughter to you.
You are a brave boy.
I see the signs of a hero in you.
Or else who would dare to talk to me.
Who would dare to see my eyes?
Who would dare to touch my feet?'

Then the demon mother built up an *Modo*. Big snakes became the rafters and beams; small snakes became the *kusla*.

She gave her daughter in marriage to Chital Singh. Both of them stayed there for some days, enjoying their conjugal life like *Kaya sange chhaya*—like the shadow with the body.

Then Chital planned to return to his home. He begged for a necklace from his mother-in-law. The necklace had magical powers. While coming back with his beautiful wife, Chital Singh saw a *yogi* practising yoga. The *yogi* was a fraud and debaucher. Seeing the beautiful wife of Chital Singh, he wanted to abduct her.

The *Yogi* chanted a *mantra* and there emerged a forest between Chital Singh and his wife. He turned Chital Singh into a horse using his magical power and sitting on that horse, he abducted the latter's wife and went towards the city.

The *Yogi*, while going on the horse with Chital's wife saw that seven water fairies-sisters (*sat baheni jalkamini*) were bathing in the river naked. The *yogi* took away their clothes using a *mantra* and the water fairies were helpless. They could not come out of the water.

Chital Singh, through his magical necklace, got back his previous human figure. He immediately invoked goddess Patmisri and he got his *uden puden ghoda* and magical sword (*patkhanda*).

He saw that the seven water fairies sisters were crying in the water for their clothes. Chital Singh slew the fraud *yogi* and gave back the dresses of the seven water fairies-sisters.

He also wanted to take along with him the youngest sister of the water fairies sisters, and wanted to marry her and he was allowed.

While returning home with his two beautiful wives, he came across the kingdom of Kendu Khutlia. They cooked food under a tree. Two soldiers of that city saw the two beautiful women and reported it to the king. The king was a debaucher. He sent his men to get the two women, but they failed. At last, the king came with a *kendu khutla* (a wooden log as his weapon) to fight with Chital Singh.

A combat took place between Chital Singh and Kendu Khutlia's king. Chital Singh's wife encouraged him singing thus:

'O my dear husband-"swamy"
Kill from the right
Kill from the left
You slay the Kendu Khutlia with your sword.
The king will die.'

Hearing the song, Chital Singh got the hint and attacked the king and killed him.

Chital Singh took Kendu Khutlia's only daughter as his wife and left the city.

On the way back, he came across the Haldigundi kingdom. They took shelter under a tree. The soldiers of Haldigundi king saw the beautiful women and reported it to the king. The king was a debaucher. He wanted to take the three beautiful women from Chital Singh. Chital Singh sat on his *uden puden ghoda* and fought with the king.

The first wife gave the hint to her husband, to kill the Haldigundi king.

'Oh my dear husband,
Attack from right,
Attack from the left,
To kill the Haldigundi king
Break the *Haldi* piece.'

Hearing this, Chital Singh killed the Haldigundi king.

On his way back, Chital Singh visited his friends. He met one of them and went to meet another friend. He rested there and went to his first friend. He met all his friends one by one.

Then Chital came to *Kankaradharu*. Then he came to *Bentmaru*. They all gave valuable presents to Chital Singh.

After that, he made a long journey for 12 months. At last, he arrived at his own village with lots of presents and valuables. He stayed in his sixth brother Kurra Singh's home. The three wives of Chital Singh also stayed in that house. Then, he went to meet his five elder brothers:

'O my brother Gagana Singh,
Lend me some place to stand for

O my brother Bhubana Singh
Lend me some place
I will beg and live my life
O my brother Herna Singh
Lend me a shelter,
I will fill my belly begging from door to door
Oh my brothers,
Many warriors have given their heads to my sword,
Oh my five sisters-in-law
Better you stand apart from your husbands.'

The sisters-in-law replied,

'You are younger brother-in-law
We have cared for you,
You are the young, we have given you shelter
On our lap when you were a child.
Please listen to us.'

But, Chital Singh did not listen to anybody. He said, 'for my share of a small piece of land, your husbands killed me. How can I forget that?'

Saying this, he killed his five elder brothers. He gave half his property to Kurra Singh and his sixth sister-in-law. Chital Singh and his three wives lived happily. (Singer: Khaga Majhi, Talpadar)

Interpretation of Content

According to Gond myth and ritual practice, Budha Deo is the first progenitor of the Gonds and he is also the first cultivator. Bearing a conch, lotus, club, and chakra similar to Vishnu, the Hindu God, it is revealed that the Gond people wanted him to be his incarnation. Killing the demon again signifies the episode of *Bramhanda Puran* in which the *Meda Asura* (Madhu Kaitava in Sanskrit myth) was killed by God and out of his bone and flesh, mountains and earth were created.

After establishing the solid earth, he started cultivation in Sunabeda, the highland of Kalahandi adjoining eastern Chhatishgarh, from which four rivers emerged. Sunabeda is said to be the abode of all gods and goddesses, because this land bears the heritage of the past 2,000 years.

After cultivation, Budha Deo married Dharnimata. Thereafter, he fought with the Kondhs and defeated them. The villages they came across were Sakhatora (first village where Budha Deo came down), Darlipara or Bhog dihi (Budha Deo married here), Chatuanka (goddess put her spoon), Painripani (Budha Deo took rest keeping his foot ornament), Khomtia raij (eastern Kalahandi where the Kondhs are dominant), and Keusingi (the last place from where Budha Deo went to Ganga and returned). These are the places with Gond predomination and the Gond God Budha Deo is worshipped. The geographical location of the myth is in Kalahandi adjoining Bolangir and Chhatishgarh.

This is a caste genealogy in which the first progenitor or the first worshipper of Maha Deo was described as a hero. Budha Deo is worshipped in Kalahandi and Koraput. He is also known as Budharaja.

The myth is a symbolization of the creation myth to describe the status of the Gonds that spans over long periods in local history in which first cultivation, then marriage, establishment of Gond villages, fighting with the Kondhs and defeating them, and establishment of Gond territory are described.

Creation Myth of the Gonds

Interestingly, the creation myth of the Gonds is similar to that of the Kondhs, the Bhunjia, and the Paharias. But culturally and politically, Gonds are dominant in determining the religious hierarchy. All communities share the creation myths across the geographical regions of Kalahandi. The motifs used in the myths are:

i. Deluge in the earth;

ii. Sending the earthworm to get earth from the nether region/tortoise to help the earthworm in getting the earth from the underworld;

iii. Supreme God created crow from his sweat/dirt;

iv. Supreme God wanted to create earth in the deluge;

v. God established the earth in the deluge;

vi. A demon is killed and the parts of his body become mountains, rivers, trees etc;

vii. God wanted to check for the existence of human beings;

viii. Crow searched for humans and found a boat/gourd/bamboo box floating in the water;

ix. They were brother and sister;

x. God disfigured their faces with small pox and separated them for 12 years;

xi. They were reunited, but not recognizing each other, they got married and the first progenitor of the Gonds/Kondhs/Bhunjia was born;

xii. Kinship relation developed;

xiii. Totem, relationship with nature and birds, and animals;

xiv. Distribution of gods and goddesses;

xv. Distribution of land based on clan and settlement in jungle, establishment of village/ fight with other tribes for power and land;

xvi. Formation of social rules and some prohibitions;

xvii. Gods and goddesses as supreme god and first progenitor;

xviii. Nature worship: earth as universal mother and sun god as universal father;

xix. Creation of paddy, creation of cultivation;

xx. Loan, borrowing system, rural economic systems;

xxi. Etiological myths attached to creation myths;

xxii. Naming of the locations with their supernatural deeds.

Cultivation of paddy by Mahadeo (Siva) in Sunabeda with the help of Bhima is a widely popular myth in middle-eastern India. This is the nature myth. Cultivation of paddy in Kalahandi and Koraput districts has proven to be the ancient place on earth where cultivation of paddy was practised. The kind of paddy that is cultivated is narrated in the myth. The episode of Mahadeo (Siva) and his wife, goddess Parvati, as the first progenitor of the Gonds is narrated. The Gonds belong to the Dravidian language group and Mahadeo (Siva) is a Dravidian God. According to the Gond priest, Mahadeo and Parvati are their father and mother, respectively. They had two sons: Ganesha or Gana and Skandha. Ganesha became 'Gond' and Skandha became 'Kandh' or Kondh. Thus Gond and Kondh are two brothers. The Gond proverb '*Gond aru Kondh maa mausir poo*' means Gond and Kondh are two sons of two sisters. Therefore, they are two milk brothers (*dudhbhai*). Both Gond and Kondh belong to the Dravidian language group.

In course of time, Gond myth has been influenced by Hindu mythology. The protagonists such as Rama, Sita, and Rawan have found a place in the myth. The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhatishgarh identify themselves as the descendants of the Vedic sage Pulastya. Rawan, the villain king of the *Ramayana* was the descendant of sage Pulastya. Gonds are known as *Paulastya Vamsi* (Ravana) and *Surya Vamsi* (Rama). Thus, the identification of Gonds with the Ramayana age is significant in terms of their cultural assimilation in course of time.

Mahadeo was the first cultivator on earth to teach mankind the art of agriculture. The food gatherer Gonds turned into food producers; it is portrayed in the myth. While the first Gond creation myth reflects the evolution stage of earth and mankind, in another myth, a later development, Siva influences as cultivator-protagonist. The shift from one stage of civilization to the other is represented in these two mythical epic narratives. Gond myths bear the descriptions of human settlement and their early pattern of subsistence.

Caste Genealogies: *Purja*

In the Gond community, each Gond clan has their *Purja* and caste genealogist, the Parghania. The eight *sagas* of Gonds maintain their caste myths and genealogies by worshipping their sacred text, *purja*.

Parghania is the clan bard and the oral historian of the Gond clan. Each clan has their land territory and administrative system. The clan territory and administrative unit was known as *Parghana*. The chief of the *Parghana* was the Gond ruler. The Gond Parghanias believe that since the elder brother sat on the throne for administration he became the king, and as the younger brothers hold the *chhatra* beside the king's throne, they became the parghania. Each Parghania claims that they have their own territory and area of operation.

Purja, the Gond creation myths and caste genealogies contain the universe of the Gond myth, history, and legend.

1. Creation of the universe, of earth, of gods and goddesses, distribution of gods and goddesses among the clans, distribution of land, territory, throne, totemic symbols etc.
2. Status of Gonds according to their profession. Markam and Netam have high status in comparison with other clans.
3. History of migration of Gonds from their place of origin and the story of settlement. Struggle and compromise with other human races during their migration and settlement.
4. Maintaining the chronology of lineage and genealogies through maintenance of characters and events. Sequence of character and important events determine the caste genealogies.
5. Framing the socio-religious rules and maintaining social control.
6. All narrations of the Parghania are not final. The Gond clans validate this.
7. Sometimes, the language in a *Purja* is esoteric and the meaning of the content is difficult to understand.
8. A one-line description of a *Purja* becomes an oral epic. For instance, if there is a line of a Gond hero killing a white tiger, it refers to the tradition-bound history and social memory of the singer who gets the clue from the event of killing the white tiger, and attaches the story to the Gond hero who actually had a history of killing a white tiger. It means the oral epic is the elaboration of the Gond legendary hero. *Purja* is the source of oral history, heroic action, and culture heroes. In Budha Deo myth, it is narrated that he cultivated in Sunabeda. This line represents an elaborate myth in another long narrative mythical song.
9. Geographical areas are represented in the myth and genealogies mention the settlement of different Gond clans in different villages of Kalahandi.
10. War between the Gonds and the Kondhs is narrated in a line. When and where the war took place is not captured in the social history of Kalahandi. Only a line is mentioned on this event in the Budhadeo myth. A fight between the Gonds and Kondhs are mentioned in Gond proverbs.
11. In Budhadeo myth, Gond villages bearing the ritual significance and historic events of Budhadeo are mentioned. Sunabeda, Sakhatora, Baabbir, Darlipada, Painri, Chatuanka, Ampani, and Kesinga are the villages that stretch from the East to West and North to South of Kalahandi. Territorial map of the Gond myth can be prepared on the basis of the myth.
12. The language of the myth is symbolic and highly Gond-tradition bound. This bears the totem, clan symbols, Gondi language, and symbolic representation of birds and animals (e.g., Sixteen-horned sheep is cock, *sakhabbaka* means sacrifice).

Interpretation of Gond Oral Epic: Chital Singh Chhatri

Epic in a community represents the cultural excellence and collective creativity of mankind in a given context. The heroic epic not only describes the nature of the heroes and heroines of a community, but also includes descriptions on various stages of development, represents the struggles of life, reflects tradition and change, captures changing perspectives and comparative views on life of the community through its characters and events.

Oral epics capture the story of human origin and settlement, conflicts and resolutions, gender relations, beliefs, worldviews and value system, flora and fauna, indigenous knowledge and the extent of influence of other cultures and its reinterpretations. In this context, the *Chital Singh* epic may be divided into three parts. The division is based on the following events.

The epic narrates different stages of the situation; to get clues for analysis, the entire epic may be divided into four major events.

The epic may be classified into four sub-themes as follows:

Event	Detailed narration of the events
Event I	Conflict between hero and his elder brothers over paternal landed property; separation of youngest brother (hero) from the elders; hero's leaving home with a promise to take revenge.
Event II	Gained magical powers from the Clan goddess; became friends with extraordinarily knowledgeable and skilled persons; did wonderful things: social service, knowledge best utilized and friends were recovered.
Event III	Love and romance of the Hero, marriage, respect towards women, rescuing women from danger, dignity, friends rewarded and revisited, home-coming.
Event IV	Regaining of lost land, reward and punishment.

Event I: Inference

The process of sharing property among brothers, ill-treatment of the youngest one by select brothers, the principle of 'least for last' and 'lion's share for elders', and the way Chital Singh, the hero of the epic, lost his hold upon the brothers' share created a conflict among the brothers which led to a separation are the events described. Chital Singh faced all the tortures meted out by his brothers. Only his immediate elder brother and his wife were in favour of him. But out of fear, the couple remained silent.

Chital raised his voice against the unrighteous and successfully overcame the conspiracy mooted by the brothers to kill him. He got back his life owing to the blessings of God, because of his courage, knowledge, and righteousness. Chital became brave and seasoned to live the life full of unseen challenges. He left home with a promise to punish those who had tried to kill him.

Event II: Inference

Event II is the most fascinating part of the narration, which describes a variety of incidents in reflecting local knowledge, facing human problems and finding solutions, managerial ability, and decision-making power of the hero. On the way, the hero picked up three powerful persons, knowledgeable friends, who excelled in different skills. Their potential was well understood by the hero and he made up his mind to use their capacities at the correct time and place.

Friends of the Hero

Name	Expertise of the friend
Bentmaru (Making rope out of dust/ash)	The Hero found *Bentmaru* while he was preparing a rope out of dust, according to the narration. He knew the technique of solidification from crystal to solid. It is probable that *Bentmaru* had knowledge on the preparation and use of iron. Making a rope from dust means melting the iron ore in the earth to get solid out of it, and turning the rest into ash. He could also hunt animals.
Kankaradharu	The Hero was fascinated to discover that *kankaradharu* (Crab-catcher) has a life-giving ability. He also had the knowledge of harvesting water from the earth using the crab. It might be an indigenous water-harvesting technique which was in practice using crabs. Kankaradharu was an expert in cultivating crabs in water-prone areas. When there was no water in the city, the springing of water from a dry land again signifies the dependence of man on ground water than rain water. Knowledge on ground water is known to old men, who were selecting land for digging ponds and wells. A proverb says *Kondh Kurmel Matirdub* *Jenne basle Setban subh.* (The Kondh, Kurmel mouse, and the Dub grass - where these three things are found, it is considered auspicious)
Gai-charau (Cowherd)	The Hero was astonished on seeing the swimming skills of *Gai-charau* along with the cows in the river. Managing the cows in water is certainly a harder task than managing them on land. He was found to be one of the best in animal husbandry and swimming. Similarly, he was an expert at controlling snakes. It is mentioned in the narration that *Gai-charau* used his skill in killing the black serpent *Kalinangen*. Taming the snake is an important practice in both Indian reality and imagination.

The real world of the epic of *Chital Singh* is full of local knowledge. This may be classified into occupation, caste, flora and fauna, natural resources, human resources and settlement.

Category	*Bentmaru* Friend I	*Kankaradharu* Friend II	*Gai-charau* Friend III	Chital Singh
Occupation	Hunting	Fishing	Herding	Primitive society
Caste	Hunter-gatherer	Fishing community	Herding community	Primitive society

Flora and Fauna	Wild animals, dense forest	Aquatic farming	Domestic animals	Tending animals
Natural resources	Minerals	Water resource, Settlement of humans, Better ground water potential	Water resource Forest coverage	Use of water for cultivation, Iron technology
Human resource	Expert in hunting, making iron weapons	Water-harvesting techniques, Getting water during crisis	Swimming techniques, Taming cattle	Getting help from friends, courage, unity, sharing of life, solving critical situations, respect for knowledge
Settlement	Nomadic	Settled	Settled	Settled

With these qualities and support from capable friends, the Hero created an opportunity to learn from others, have good understanding of other kingdoms and human culture, learning about flora and fauna to make his expedition successful.

With his managerial capabilities and leadership, he used all his friends in a positive manner to achieve his goal and solve all human problems. His leadership and heroic actions may be found in the following instances:

The three friends of Chital Singh were helpful in solving the problems of the three kingdoms. Chital was a manager; he solved the crisis through his best friends, who were experts. While the problems of the kingdom were solved, the kings offered their daughters in marriage to the eligible.

With a commitment to his friends to visit them again, Chital started his journey and reached a settlement with a different culture. Chital adapted to that culture, and fell in love with a girl. But before marriage the hero had to prove his dynamism, courage, knowledge, and respect for other women inorder to satisfy the girl's mother.

Chital did everything successfully and got married.

On his way back, Chital rescued seven sisters from a tantric, who was an adulterer. Similarly, he defended a good number of kings and married their daughters.

Chital Singh is the culture hero of the Gonds. The Gond singers and ethnic bards have portrayed Chital as the model of a Gond hero who is equally supernatural, miraculous, and is an embodiment of all human capabilities. But as it is seen, Chital is somewhat extraordinary in the collective imagination of the Gond memory: even though he faced a lot of hurdles, he overcame them.

In reality, younger brothers in Gond families are found idle and irresponsible, because their elder brothers are hard working and responsible. The epic of Chital signifies this. In Gond society after the younger brother is married, he is separated, gets

his share of land, and forms the nucleus family. It is obvious that the elders achieve the power and status next to the father. The mother has no power to decide. Therefore, the elder brothers sometimes exploit the younger brothers, and conflicts arise.

Sacrificing human beings for better harvest and levelling the land etc. are practised among the tribal people in Orissa. This is reflected in the epic story. Women are by nature kind hearted, courageous, cooperative, and helpful to their husbands. Chital's wife helped him during his fight, and gave hints to attack the enemy. This signifies that the Gond women are equally courageous and brave. Therefore, a Gond woman is portrayed as the tigress in the jungle.

Name of the friends	**Expertise and Interpretation**	**Technology**
Bentmaru (A hero who made solid from liquid)	Chital found *Bentmaru* while he was preparing a rope from the dust, as narrated in the epic. He knew the techniques of solidification from crystal to solid. Probably, *Bentmaru* had the knowledge of iron extraction and its use. Melting the earth and getting iron ore is a common practice among the tribal community. *Bentmaru* was very good at making iron weapons, which could be used in hunting. He was capable,equally of hunting wild animals.	Invention of Iron
Kankaradharu	Chital was fascinated and interested in Kankaradharu when he was convinced that kankaradharu had a life-saving skill. He found that *kankaradharu* was rearranging bones and turning them into living crabs. Hence, it might be an indigenous water-harvesting technique which was in practice through crab cultivation, and *kankradharu* was one of those experts who knew better how to cultivate crab in such water-prone areas and during crisis. Using his technique, water could be obtained easily.	Invention of water-harvesting techniques
Gai-charau	Chital was astonished on looking at the style of swimming of *Gai-charau* along with the cows. Chital discovered the strength, courage, and techniques of managing the cows across a river full of water. He made *Gai-charau* his friend, who was found to be the best in animal husbandry and swimming. He was also an expert in controlling snakes. As the narration goes, *Gai-charau* used his skill to control and kill *Kalinangen*, the black serpent. However, the influence of Hindu mythical thought and the episode of Lord Krishna killing the Kaliya is portrayed (known as *kaliya dalana*). This is a subject to note.	Saving life from snake bites, and having the skill to overcome the danger of snakes.

It may be noted that the three friends of Chital symbolically, represent the flora, fauna, region, land, water, occupation, castes, technologies, human and natural resources, patterns of subsistence etc. Here, the major indicators of the epic are land and water. Usage of iron and getting water in watershed areas are two inventions. Regarding human struggle, the hero has shown his excellence in facing the turmoil of life and overcoming them.

Techno-Economic Life of the Gonds

Hero and his friends	***Bentmaru***	***Kankaradharu***	***Gai-charau***	**Key indicator**
Occupation	Hunting	Fishing	Herding	Primitive society
Caste	Hunter-gatherer	Fishing community	Herding community	Primitive society
Flora and fauna	Wild animals Dense forest	Aquatic farming	Domestic animals	Tending of animals
Natural resources	Minerals	Water resources, better ground water potential, forest coverage	Domestication of animals, water resources, river side settlement	Use of water for cultivation
Human resources	Expert in hunting, making iron weapons	Settled	Settled	Iron technology
Settlement	Nomadic	Agricultural, settled	Agricultural, settled	Settled farmers

The epic hero is friendly, good at managing problems, courageous, respects others' knowledge, judges others' potential, and helps them in difficult situations. With these qualities and capable friends, Chital through his expedition, had chances to gain knowledge from others and a good understanding of other kingdoms. A reflection of Gond culture in the epic is seen in the narration. The fight among brothers for land and neglecting of the younger ones is common in reality. But in the epic, the youngest brother takes revenge against his five elder brothers. The managerial capacity of the hero of the epic is given in Table II.

Knowledge	Problem	Problem-Solving Method	Stages of Subsistence
Bentmaru (Kingdom I)	Description of Kingdom and Problems/situation: Kendu khudia. Major Community: Hunter and Gatherer. Flora: Kendu (Tobacco leaf and firewood) Wild animal: Tiger. Problem: Attack of wild animals	Chital, with his friend *Bentmaru*, killed the man-eater tiger, and absolved the people from the fear of the same. Knowledge of hunting wild animals and preparation of hunting weapons and techniques may be disseminated to his people through training and practice.	Primitive and pre-agricultural society
Gai-charau (Kingdom II)	Agricultural society Name: Haldigundi (Turmeric powder). Occupation: cultivation/ source of livelihood - Haldi cultivation, Cattle tending Major problem: snake bites.	In killing *Kalinangen*, the black serpent, he saved the people from danger	Agricultural society
Kankaradharu (Kingdom III)	Land and water management. Problem: Severe water crisis water shed areas	Knowledge of kankaradharu was used in the kingdom, and kankaradharu as a waterman directed his efforts to solve the long-term need of water. Use of pond and well.	Urban base: Use of pond and well

Good Work and Status of a Virtuous Hero

Solving the problems of the three kingdoms in three different situations signifies the use of knowledge in the right order. Knowledge has no boundary, but it should be used in the right time, in the right place, and for good reason. Dangers such as attack of tiger or snake bite, and natural problems such as water crisis are very common in the social life of Kalahandi, which has been reflected in the oral tradition. These problems are no doubt social and natural, but presented in symbolic form. The attack of a tiger on the kingdom is a challenge to the power, may be a counter power, which was a threat to the ruler. The king taking the help of an unknown young hero to solve the problem signifies his wit and intelligence. The static power is challenged by the counter power and it is the knowledge and power of the hero that saved the king, which made the king inturn offer his daughter to the hero.

This again signifies that knowledge has no boundary, but it should be used at the right time, in the right place, and for good reasons.

The knowledge of the friends was not only appreciable, but also had a demand according to the situation. Owing to their efforts, they got the opportunity to marry kings' daughters and occupy great status. A man can achieve good position through his knowledge and good work with courage.

Protagonists such as the king and queen have been the ideal models in epics, both oral and written, in Indian context, and these realities have been reverted into the epics. The hero or his friends have shown their miraculous achievement by addressing the social problems and in return they have been awarded with three beautiful princesses. While the king and queen are of high status in the caste hierarchy, the hero's friends such as hunter, fisherman, and cowherd have been able to achieve the status of marrying the princess of three kingdoms. In reality, a Gond hero is the combination of three qualities of hunter, fisherman, and swimmer.

Heroes are needed in times of social unrest to mitigate the problems and emerge as role models for the society. Chital Singh is a role model in Gond culture.

Besides, belief in magic and supernaturalism, worshipping the clan goddess, human sacrifice, flying on magic horse, getting magic sword, man turning into a fly and regaining his form are some of the events in the epic which represent the religious belief and practices of the Gonds.

Sacrificing human beings in the field for better harvest, sacrificing birds and animals to the goddess to propitiate Her to get blessings and magical power are influences of Gond religious practices. Magic and sorcery is strongly believed in Gond society. The young tribal men try to attract beautiful girls through magical medicine (*mohini*). The magical power was also misused by the fraudulant yogi. But they are not respected and are despised by the society. Therefore, the hero punished the evil Yogi.

The Hero is always extraordinary and incomparable. The Hero was the younger brother and he was unmarried. He was careless, irresponsible, and was playing dice with God. Playing dice in tribal society symbolizes people who do not like to work and remain idle. Chital, as he was unmarried, had no family responsibility. So his brothers were unhappy with him. But when he was assigned to do work in the fields he did it easily. A difficult work for the common man is easy for a hero.

Event III: Hero as a Seeker of the Heroine

Chital had refused the three princesses from three kingdoms and conducted his three friends' marriages with the three princesses. He had the choice of his own, and the singer had done justice in discovering the heroine through the hero in a place where they two could meet. Chital accepted the culture, and adapted to it. He fell in love with a girl in the forest.

The reason for not marrying the three princesses and offering them to his friends was that the heroine of the epic is someone else. In the forest, Chital discovered that there was a house of a demonness, who had a beautiful daughter. Chital convinced the demon-mother and married her daughter and got the magic necklace.

The test of the hero was intensified with his fight with a tantric Yogi. The Yogi turned Chital into a horse and took his wife. Again, the Yogi was after the seven water fairies-sisters. Chital managed to kill the Yogi and save the water fairies. Interestingly, Chital wanted to marry the youngest of the water fairies.

On his way back, Chital defeated a good number of kings and married their daughters, because of his courage.

A sense of respect for women, an ability to safeguard women in difficult situations with strength and a courageous spirit were the important characters to become a hero among these heroines.

Therefore, the hero has to appear for many tests and ordeals to prove his virtues, abilities, and supernatural actions. He is also powerful because of the blessings of the Supreme God and clan goddess. A hero is considered semi-human and semi-divine. Hence, Chital was able to get the youngest water fairy as his wife.

Event IV: Regaining of Lost Power

If rightly explained and questioned as to why Chital left his parental home for more than 12 years and punished his culprit-brothers after returning from his great expedition, the reason is dispute over the distribution of parental property. Chital did not lose his humane nature. He could have killed them there. He made himself more capable than all his elder brothers and then came to them. He killed his elder brothers.

In the Gond family system, the elder brother is more responsible and the younger brothers enjoy the labour of elders. The conflict of sharing land between the brothers is usually found in the family when elder brother demands more property because his status is next to the father's as the head of the family. The discontent of the younger brothers is represented in the epic.

One important reason for portraying the younger brother as the hero is as a counter-point to classical imagination. In written epics, elder-brother heroes are more more powerful and achieve enormous status in comparison to their younger brothers and the actions of younger brother heroes are insignificant. Such instances can be found in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* where Rama is more important than Bharata and Satrughna. Similarly, Nakula and Sahadeva in *Mahabharata* are less significant in comparison with Arjuna and Bhima. But in folk oral epics, the younger brother is the hero and elder brothers have been portrayed as land grabbers, selfish, and being cruel towards their younger brother.

The journey of struggle from his native land to the world was full of adventure, unpredictable threats, opportunities, defeat and victory, and romance.

Chital came across many unforeseen enemies and friends. He punished his enemies with his skill and strength, whereas he rewarded his friends with princesses.

The agony and insecurity, the joy of victory and fear of defeat are reflected in the epic narration. The response of the audience towards the five elder brothers is negative; all were in support of Chital Singh.

The male predomination in the epic is visible from the title of the epic story —Chital Singh. Chital is the centre of the epic. The Yogi character was reversed. In Indian written epics, the Yogi is a positive character, whereas in folklore the yogi is a debaucher.

The heroine helped Chital two kings: Kendu Khutlia Raja and Haldigundi Raja. The role of the heroine in the battle field signifies the sharing of responsibilities between the heroine and the hero.

Chital Singh had offered the princesses to his three friends in three kingdoms. He also married a water fairy, though he already had a wife. This reflects the tribal man marrying two women. All these reveal that women in epics are less important, as they do not play any role to express their views, and without any choice, they are offered to anybody the hero likes. The father of the princess also had nothing to express.

Compensation of Nature with Culture: Thirst for Water!

Kalahandi is a land of recurring drought. Getting water through magic is the imagination of the epic singers and the people. The crab-catcher *(Kankaradharu)* had the magical power to get water from the earth. Scarcity of water is reflected in the collective memory of the people and the singers. The epic singer has tried to compensate for the deficit of nature through culture.

Notes and References

[1] Russel and Hiralal, R.B., (1916) *The Tribes and castes of the Central Provinces of India,* Vol.II, London: Macmillan and Company Limited: p-41.

[2] Census of India, 1971.

[3] Nayak, P.K., (Ed) (2004) *Tribes of Orissa Directorate of SC/ST Research Institute,* Bhubaneswar Pp.135-140.

[4] Ganga Dei - the village goddess of any Gond village; she is worshipped along with Budha Deo.

[5] A hand-written manuscript on Gond genealogy-Purja, collected from Sri Parasuram Majhi, Gond Viallage headman of Malpada village in Sinapali Block in Kalahandi during1986.

[6] Naik, T.B., (1973) The Tribes of Central India, *In The Tribal people of India,* Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publication Division, New Delhi: Pp.138-141.

Chapter 6

KONDH ORAL EPICS

Next to the Gonds, the Kondhs constitute the largest major tribe in Orissa and are mainly found in the South-western parts of the state. According to the 1991 Census of India, the total population of the Kondhs in the state was 11,40,374 of which 1,46,225[1] was their population in Kalahandi district alone.

The Kondhs in Kalahandi are divided into two groups according to their geographical distribution. The Kondhs in Lanjigarh and Thuamul Rampur are known as Kutia Kondh. They constitute a small number and have a distinct language that is different from that of the Desia Kondh of the plains of Kalahandi. While the language of the Kutia Kondh belongs to the Dravidian language group, the language of the Desia Kondh is closer to the local Oriya language. The language of the Desia Kondh has a close affinity with that of the Dom – a scheduled caste of Kalahandi. The Desia Kondhs have become settled agriculturists. They owned the land and held administrative powers in the village as the headmen. They also exercised their religious power over the village.

The Kondh were practising human sacrifice during the mid-eighteenth century. It was known as *Meriah;* it was performed at a sacrificial post. After the obliteration of the practice of human sacrifice, a buffalo was sacrificed as a substitute. Even now in some Kondh villages, buffalo sacrifices take place once in 12 years. In the history of Orissa the Kondhs were known for their practice of human sacrifice. This was suppressed in the later part of nineteenth century.

The Kondhs in Kalahandi were landowners and their population in 1876 was 76 per cent of the total population of the then Kalahandi. They were labourers, simple and truthful. Taking advantage of their simplicity, many non-tribals grabbed their landed property and left the Kondhs poor. But they have maintained their ethnic identity through their religion, music, rituals, festivals etc.

As stated in the previous chapters, the Bogua and the Maral are two distinct singer-communities who belong to the Kondh community. The mythical and epic songs they sing have a cultural significance. They sing *Gova Utra,* the mythical narrative, during the buffalo-sacrifice festival. They also sing *Bhima Sidi,* epic of Bhima, during the month of *Aswina.*

The narratives collected are:

1. Kondh Creation Myth
2. *Gova Utra* myth I
3. *Gova Utra* myth II
4. *Bhima Sidi*
5. *Nangmati Rajaphulia*
6. *Manduka Majhi*
7. *Kondhmeli Geet*

While the Kondh creation myth and Gova Utra represent the mythical culture of the Kondhs, *Nangmati Rajaphulia* is a local epic. *Manduka Majhi* is an epic tragedy in which a boy is sacrificed by his uncles as *Meriah. Kondhmeli geet* describes the struggle of the Kondhs against the Kultas and non-tribal land grabbers of Kalahandi.

Creation Myth of the Kondhs

There was a great deluge. Mahadeo saw the four sides of the deluge. He found a plateau on which was *meda asur* – a demon that Mahadeo wanted to kill. The goddess wanted a sheep of sixteen horns (cock) if she had to kill the demon. God promised to offer it and the goddess fought the demon. The demon swallowed her, but she came out through his anal path. The goddess then fixed a wooden post at the demon's anus. When the demon swallowed the goddess again, he could not bring her out. The goddess then tore the demon's belly and killed him. When the goddess tore the belly of the demon, the whole world was covered with darkness. The other gods and goddesses invoked Thakurani Gungadi – the goddess to light up the world. The goddess lit up the world.

The goddess tore the dead body of the demon into four and buried it. The head of the demon was used as the cloth on the head of Vasuki Nag - the great serpent carrying the earth on her head, according to Hindu mythology - to hold up the earth. It is believed that an earthquake occurs whenever the Naga king changes his head cloth.

The earth was created. The hands and legs of the demon became the mountains; his hair became creepers; his blood became rivers and the veins rivulets.

God then created the Sea of Milk. He created a tender calf. One day, the calf drank the milk from the sea of milk. God created human beings. Gods were created in *Kanudor* and men in *Manudor.*

Initially the paddy, mango, and all other fruits were very big. But when god created the earth, the seeds and fruits became very small.

Goddess Jaden Budhi searched for a human being to eat. The man asked the goddess what she would like to eat. The goddess replied, 'if you want to worship me, I should eat the first issue of your children'. The man agreed to it. The man wanted to offer his first issue to the goddess, but the priest wanted to offer his son to the goddess. Since then, the eldest son is sacrificed to propitiate the goddess.

Time passed by. Gradually, the priest and others were not interested in offering a human. They went to a Brahmin and said, 'The goddess is asking for the first issue of the man. What shall we do?' The Brahmin said, 'sacrifice a *tamba Khuria pod* (a buffalo with copper coloured hooves) to the goddess once every 12 years. Don't sacrifice the son.' (*Po* means son, *Pod* means buffalo)

Since then, the Kondhs sacrifice a *Pod* instead of a *Po*.

Parmanand Jani, Gova Jani of Doto village — Singer of version documented by author.

Gova Utra - Creation Myth Recited During Buffalo Sacrifice (Part-1)

Eulogy

Juhar....
Oh Mother, you are the king of the virtue
Oh Mother earth, O Dharmraja,
Oh earth goddess and Oh sun god,
The virtuous is the victor and sinner, the defeated,
You are the preserver of the universe.
To all creatures, Oh mother! Have pity on us,
We are your left over food,
We are your spit; have pity on us
We are initiating the singing of your glory
Please help us remember the forgotten words.
Oh Goddess of words.
Juhar....

(The priest offers some liquor to the earth goddess and distributes some to all the co-singers. All the co–singers then get ready to sing. *Sadki* is played to maintain the rhythm of the song.)

Creation Myth (Poetry Narrative)

There was a Kondh couple – *Dokra* and *Dokri* - living in a village.
One day *Dokra* went to the forest to hunt.
He saw a deer and got ready to shoot an arrow at the deer.
The deer turned back to the Kondh and said,
'Oh friend, don't kill me,
After seven days there will be a terrible rain
For seven days and seven nights,
And there will be deluge on the earth.
Creation will perish in this rain, including you.
Try to save your life than to kill me.'
The Kondh was surprised to see a talking deer.

He knew that this must be a miraculous god.
Throwing his bow and arrow,
Folding his hands he asked the deer,
'Forgive me. How can I save my children?
How can I survive?
I am not worried about my life.
I am worried about my children.'
The deer said,
'Keep your children in a gourd,
Store food and drink for twelve years within it and leave them,
They will survive floating on the water of the deluge
They will create a new generation of human beings.'

After listening to the talking deer,
Dokra came back home.
He started killing his domestic animals for a feast.
Dokri asked,
'Why are you killing them all?'
Dokra said, 'Deluge will occur.
What is the use of keeping these animals?
I will enjoy the feast.'

After seven days, the deluge occurred,
Dokra and *Dokri* put their son and daughter in a gourd
Provided them with food for twelve years.

The whole earth drowned,
Everything was lost in the deluge.
There was only water, and more water.
Mahaprabhu [*Nirakar*] wanted to create the world.
He created a crow from the dirt of his body
He asked the crow,
'Go and see if any human being is alive in the deluge'
The crow flew to the East, West, North, and South.
And finally found a boy and girl inside a gourd.
The crow told Mahadeo,
'A boy and girl are in a gourd floating on the water.'
God wanted to create earth.
The crow went to the *kenchua*.
Earthworm got the earth from the nether region (*Patala*).
The *kachhim* helped it.
The crab also helped in getting the earth.
The crow got the earth and gave it to Mahaprabhu.

Mahaprabhu divided the earth into seven parts,
Keeping the parts in seven lotus leaves,
He threw them into the deluge.
Seven islands (*dwipa*) were created.
Next Mahadeo created birds,
Created animals, trees, mountains, and rivers.
Now, Mahaprabhu
Called the son and daughter of *Dokra* and *Dokri*
They were alive in the gourd.
Mahaprabhu asked,
'Who are you?'
They said,
'We are brother and sister.'
God thought, how can this brother and sister procreate!
Because they know each other.
They are brother and sister.
So he separated them for twelve years.
He disfigured their faces with smallpox.
And Lo!
After twelve years,
They met and could not recognize each other.
They were attracted,
They were fascinated,
By each other and fell in love,
And twelve sons were born.
The first son is Gond
Second son is Kondh
The third son is Bhunjia
Fourth son is Paharia
Fifth son is Dal
Sixth son is Lodha
Seventh son is Baiga
Eighth son is Parja
Ninth son is Bhumia
Tenth son is Koya
Eleventh son is Binjhal
Twelfth son is Bhima
After this, the twelve brothers perpetuated their families in this world. (Khutu Jani, Hatibandha)

Gova Utra - Part-2

The Mythical Epic (Janam khena Puran)

The *Janam khena Puran* or *Gova Utra Puran* is sung by the Gova Jani along with his assistant singers during the buffalo-sacrifice festival of the Kondhs of Kalahandi. The *Gova Utra* song starts in the night and continues till next morning. Throughout the night the myth is sung and at the end of the song, a buffalo is sacrificed.

A part of the song is presented below, as the full text is not available owing to the reason that, when once in 12 years the buffalo sacrifice takes place in a Kondh village, the storyline is sometimes misrepresented by the Gova Jani which is corrected by the senior Kondhs or the audience.

Oh Mother, you are the King of Dharma
Oh what sound is that: *gud-gud-gud*?
What sound is that: *rud-rud-rud-rud*?
What is that sound?
The sound is coming from the *rengal* tree.
It is sounding *gud-gud-gud-gud*
It is sounding like *rud-rud-rud-rud*
Penbora (God) is taking his birth.
Kanbora is taking his birth.
The kondh is jumping over twelve-hands high (about 18 feet)
Trying to touch the sky.
What is name of the Kondh?
His name is Birmisha Kondh*
He is sleeping on one of his ears
And has wrapped another ear over his body.
He never sees through his eyes,
Neither listens with his ears
He is taking his form.
Neither today nor tomorrow.
The episode of that day is narrated today.
They tied the rope and churned the sea.

*Birmisha Kondh is a mythical character who is believed to have such long ears that when he lies down on his side, one of his ears makes for a mattress for him to sleep on and the other ear makes for a blanket to cover himself with.

(That churning episode is narrated here.)

The Kondh is thinking in his mind, in his thought,
What did they do?
Oh what did they do?
Where did they go?
Which way did they prefer to go?

Oh The Kondh is jumping twelve-hands high,
Birmisha Kondh is sleeping on one of his ears and
Wrapping another ear over his body.

Oh mother, you are the king of all Dharma,
The virtuous win and the sinners perish,
The big Budaka Gadra Kondh is taking birth.
The elder Budaka Gadra Kondh
Is taking birth through two threads
One thread is *Kanudor* and another is *Manudor*
God is taking his birth in *Kanudor* thread
In *manudor* thread man is taking his birth
Kondh is taking his birth in two places named
Rataas Khand and Bogolbhata
In Rataas Khand four Kondh-brothers and
In Bogolbhata six Kondh-brothers took birth.
The Kondhs appeared in Rataas Khand and Bogolbhata
The Kondh appeared in Khusruni and Dabruni.
The Kondh old man thought
If there is a bow, there is an arrow
If there is a fire, there is a flame.
But they don't have a shelter
The Kondh have appeared in Ulma bhata.
But they did not have shelter
They have no land,
No settlement.

And the remaining clans started searching for a place for their settlement..

After this the four Kondh-clans and twelve Kondh-clans.
The elder brother and the younger brother went in front.
They cleaned the forest and settled down there.
In that dense forest there was no road.
Full of trees and thick creepers
A river was overflowing
A boatman of Katchria clan was standing there.
He was known as *Ghatparia*.
The Kondhs wanted to cross the river.
The *Ghatparia* refused.
Hurjungia (Kondh) abused the boatman.
Murjungia Kondh beat him. (Hurjungia and Murjungia are clans among the Kondhs. There are many other clans.)
But what could the boatman do?
The Kondhs crossed the river one by one.

There was no road to the other side.
The Kondh called Khura Dom and said,
Go and find a road to go ahead.
Even a fly had no road to escape.
That was one such jungle.
There was a *ghati*.
Khura Dom tried to cross the *ghati* with his cattle.
But the cattle could not cross the hill.
The Kondh ordered, 'Go and cross the hill.'
Khura Dom replied, 'Being my master, when you have failed to cross,
How can I?'
The angry Kondh pushed the cattle by pulling at their tails.
The cattle at once crossed the hill.
And lo! Sitli village was seen on the other side of the hill.
Thus after a struggle, they came from Ulma bhata to Sitli village.
Prior to the migration of the Kondhs to Sitli village,
The Gonds had settled down there.
Oh listen! The marriage ceremony of Jadan Budha (supreme god) was going on.
The Kondhs came to Sitli village.
The Majhi Gonds and Majhi Kondhs were present. The Gonds had settled there.
The Gonds thought,
What shall we do?
The Kondhs have come and want to settle here.
The Gonds have no weapon.
They have no evidence of their land ownership.
The Gonds cook food in an earthen oven.
The Gonds and the Kondhs are brothers.
(Since they were two brothers of two sisters)
The Gonds put the earthen hearth
And the Kondhs made their hearth of four stones.
They took their food and decided
Who owns the land and
What is the proof of title to the land?
A debate was going on.

The Gonds proved that the earthen hearth
Was the proof of their settlement in that village
The Kondhs said, the stone hearth
Was their proof of settlement in that village
Who would win? Either the Gonds or the Kondhs.
A meeting was held in the village

What is the proof of settlement?
Who is the actual owner of the land?

The *sianlog* discussed in the meeting.
They discussed how to prove the ownership of land.
The earthen hearth of the Gonds was washed out in the rain,
And there was no evidence of their settlement.
The Kondhs could show the stone hearth
And proved that they had the settlement.
The Gonds cleaned the jungle
And the Kondhs settled in the villages.
They divided the land, gods and goddesses,
Distributed the ancestors among themselves.
Thus they distributed the land.
The Gonds got their territory
And the Kondhs got their territory.

The *Jani* uttered the mantra:
'The son of the *Jani* is crying, oh why does he cry?
Let the rice be filled in the widow's house.
Let the dry tree bloom with branches
Let the childless woman be pregnant.
Let a handful of paddy become plenty.'

Next the different castes appeared on the earth.
On which day, at which moment
How many castes emerged?
Some people became rice,
Some became goat and sheep
Kath, Kurmi, banij Bepari
Thus twenty-four occupations were distributed among mankind.
The Gond got the sacred thread on his shoulder,
The Gaur became the *Dak Pulsia*
And servant of the Kondh Goddess.
(People becoming rice, goat, sheep, and so on refers to their adoption of occupations such as cultivation, goat rearing, shepherd and so on.)

The four Kondh-clans and six Kondh-clans assembled.
Twelve Kondh-clans are *Palaka*
Char (four) brothers Chereka Kondh
One is Beska
One is Dhamnia
Huduka and Tuduka
Ulunga and Jhulunga

Ganja Gobria, Urunga,
Sirpuria and Bogopuria clan,
Sigsigra and pogobhandlia clan,
Are twelve brothers *Palaka*,
Four brothers *Chereka*
Kana bhaira was from karuka clan
Patbandha - tying of turban is from Badaka clan
Jhi dia- offering the daughter is Jhi Ghera,
(The Kondh belong to Jhi ghera clan and offered their daughters to the Naga Kings)
Dumer, chor (stealer of fig fruit), are the Dumerka clan,
Jalkurua became the Jageska clan
Kodedhara (taking the prince on the lap) is Tuduka.
Tare tare ho nare nare (refrain)
Dale dale ho patre patre (in the branches and in the leaves)
Ganja Gubria took his birth
Beskia and Dhamnia, Dak Pulsia- Enreka
Enreka Kondh and Bong Dengka Kondh
These Kondhs distributed their land into some *Chak*
They got their Gods and Goddess as their clan share,
The Kondh said, 'let us search for more, what more to search?'
The elder brother got the *De-Duma* as his share.
Now the Kondhs started building their houses.
They cut Birna tree and used as beam and rafter
Rengal tree was not useful.
They built up the house collecting the
Wood from the jungle.
(Till that day they had no idea of cultivation)

(The singer pauses to drink some liquor from his copper pipe and he rests for about five to ten minutes. They then resume their singing. Another characteristic is that when they change a topic / episode they take pause.)

'Oh my babu,' the Kondh says
'I am telling the episode of
Creation - creation of Kondh
And creation of gods and goddesses,
The *Dev-Saran* (Gods episode) is going on.
The *Asurs* and the *Devta* are churning the ocean
What will come up?
What will be the result?
When this churning takes place,
The whole world will be in deluge,
Nirakar (formless) Supreme God

Wanted to create earth in the water.
He created black earth, red earth
Let the dry log bloom green leaves,
Let the earth turn into rice
I salute the great deluge.
The *Nirakar*,
Who never washes his hands after eating?
Who never washes up after he passes faeces?
All this drama is enacted in his house.
Oh water and water everywhere
Nirakar ordered the *Cheki chere-* Garuda bird (crow)
To fetch human being, if any.
It was water and water
There was no place to stand up
No end to the water
Adimata – supreme mother
Adipita – *Niranjan* – supreme father
And his three sons
Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswar were there.
Asur (demon) swallowed the earth.
Nirakar was sleeping
No sound, no light.
Nirakar was sleeping for thousand years.
The Garuda bird
Thought what shall I do?
It was the game of the Gods
It was the play of the Gods
What happened then?
The Garuda bird was sitting.
Taking a sword of seventeen hands-long length
He killed the demon; when one demon was killed
Hundred demons emerged out of his blood.
The *Meda Asur* was killed.
If one is killed, thousand were created.
Oh Prabhu, *Nirakar*,
Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswar
If one demon is killed, thousand demons are taking birth
I am unable to fight. What shall I do?
Go and see,
Where shall I go?
Take a *chakra* and go and finish off the demon
(Incomplete: by Paramananda Jani, Doto)
✤✤✤✤✤ Singer of version documented by author.

Bhima Sidi

Introduction

Bhima is worshipped as the rain god by the tribal people of Kalahandi. The female priestess Gurumai and the Kondh bard Bogua sing the Bhima Sidi as part of ritual performance. This mythical epic is sung by Gurbaru Parghania, from Chheliamal village of Kalahandi. Dr Dolagobinda Bisi, a scholar on folk literature, also has a version similar to this.[2]

Bhima is worshipped as the rain god in Central India and also in the region between the rivers Mahanadi and Godavari. Many people, irrespective of tribe and caste, perform the Bhima ritual to get rain. In Kalahandi, Bhima is a demigod, an assistant to Mahadeo, and the first cultivator among man.

The Gurumai and the Bogua sing the glory of Bhima in ritual performance. This is the origin myth of Bhima. A ritual marriage of Bhima is performed and the narrative is recited. In some villages, this ritual is celebrated for seven days and the Gurumai recites the mythical narrative for seven days.

The Bhima character is found in the oral narratives of the Gonds and the Kondhs. Bhima is imagined as 12 brothers. He is formless in heaven and is an incarnation on earth to enjoy human life and help Mahadeo in cultivation.

The whole episode of Bhima is divided into many sub-episodes such as

i. Birth of Bhima,

ii. Descent of Bhima through a golden and a silver string,

iii. Arrival of Bhima at the village of the heroine,

iv. Disguisement of Bhima,

v. Heroic actions of Bhima and invention of agricultural techniques,

vi. Marriage of Bhima to two sisters,

vii. Departure of Bhima to heaven with his wife.

Bhima Sidi (Translation)

Nirakar Bhima was reigning the heavens. He was formless. One day he wanted to create the universe. He wanted to take a form. So he took form in the womb of a demoness named *dhundi-raksen* Perrani-devi (like a furious woman having a huge belly, seeking a human to eat). Bhima took his shape, but failed to get a form owing to his mother's repeated abortions. On the seventh attempt, Perrani-devi swallowed him and Bhima tore her belly and came out and took birth as a God-incarnate.

Then he took his birth again in the womb of Kadmadi budhi. His father was Pawanwar Khatri. (The literary meaning of Pawanwar Khatri is *Vayu* God - warrior).

The two other names of Pawan are Anga-jadi and Anga Patar. Pawan has six wives: Usruni, Bhusruni, Babruni, Dabruni, Kadmadi, and Sikaldi; Kadmadi and Sikaldi are

sisters. As Kadmadi is Bhima's mother, Sikaldi is Bhima's aunt (*mausi* means mother's sister). Thus, Bhima took his human form from Kadmadi.

Before Bhima's incarnation on the earth, the Kondhs had originated on the earth and settled down. Bhima expressed his desire to his mother to descend to the earth. He said that he wanted to go to Urmadijani, the headman of the Beskapadar village. The *Jani*, headman, had two daughters. Bhima wanted to marry those two daughters.

Bhima said-

'O Mother!
I want to descend to the earth
I want to get down in Beskapadar
Urmadijani is the village headman
Two daughters he has
Like two flowers on a tree.
The elder is Kondhen Rani
And the younger is Dumer Rani
O mother!
I want to bring them to heaven, after marrying them
Let me go to the earth,
To bring them with me.'

Kadmadi, mother of Bhima, opposed her son's wish to go to the earth. She said,

'O Son!
Go not to the human society
There lies the majority of Kondhs.
The Kondhs are not the right kin for marital relation.
There are many types of Kondhs.
Murjungia Kondh and many more Kondhs
They don't wash their mouth after eating.
They don't clean their hands after going to the toilet.
They eat beef, which is filthy,
They take pork, which is unhealthy
O son!
Don't go to earth,
Don't go to human society!!'

But all the efforts of Kadmadi were in vain. Bhima replied-

'O mother,
The Kondhs might be taking beef,
They might be taking pork,
I will not take those foods.
I will bring the brides of the Kondhs
To the God's lineage.
If I bring them here,

Everyone would say that
Bhima has done a good thing.'

Bhima's mother agreed as she had no choice but to fulfil her son's desire. Bhima descended to the earth through a string of gold and a string of silver. He got down into a deep dense forest. The forests where Bhima got down were 12 in number: Bhavan, Bhuban, Fuban, Chuban, Khuban, Hakarban, Dulivan, Kaliban, Setsan, Silban, Gilvan, and Mahalinvan. Surprisingly, these were no birds or animals in those forests. Bhima created a woman from his body and named her Paan-jiren. This woman was a demi-goddess endowed with many supernatural powers.

Bhima created birds and animals in that forest. He disguised his own form and went to a village. On the way, he came across a *patral* forest (a forest with thick leaves). A shepherd boy was watching the grazing sheep. The boy saw Bhima and was about to run away, but Bhima caught him. By his pleasing words, Bhima found the way to Beskapadar.

The shepherd boy described the village and then the headman. He said,

'*Juhar*,
Obeisance to you! O man!
Who does not know the village Beskapadar?
The name of the village is Beskapadar.
The *Jani* is Urmadijani,
His son is Raspal Majhi.
Jani has two daughters,
One is Kondhen Rani,
And the other is Dumer Rani,
They are swinging in the
Golden swing and silver swing.
They are like two princesses, beautiful like lotuses.'

Then, the shepherd boy described the *Jani's* house:

'The doors of the *Jani's* house are narrow,
Twenty-four rooms he has
With twelve houses,
Twelve rooms for buffalo sheds.
If some beggar goes to him he fills the beggar's bag.
If somebody seeks help from the *Jani*,
He is given help, selflessly.
Hearing the name of Urmadijani,
The pregnant cow gives her way
O young man! Go to Beskapadar.
Go like a crab crawling on the way.'

Bhima thanked the shepherd boy.

In the forest there were two roads that went in opposite directions. Leaving the road to the right, he took the one to the left. He disguised himself as an ugly beggar thus:

His body was full of germs
Full of eruptions with pus

Bogua sings:

'He smells of stool and urine.
His hands and legs are like that of a leper's
With his unusual belly and chest
With his unusual physical stature
Ugly, unattractive,
He reached Urmadijani's house.'

The wife of Urmadijani, Sanadi-*Janen*, saw the beggar and took pity on him. The two daughters (heroines) saw the ugly form of the beggar and spat on him out of hatred and went into the house. They were about to vomit because of the beggar's bad smell.

They spat and abused him as he sat near the buffalo-shed. Sanadi-*Janen*, a kind-hearted woman, advised her daughters:

'O girls!
This is germ and this is gem.
O Kondhen Rani and Dumer Rani
Don't hollow the paddy,
And don't hate the man.
Why do you watch wealth,
for it may go any time
Why are you proud of life?
For it may perish anytime.
It is neither a gain nor a loss,
This happens to every one.
Beginning from child to old man
For everyone, nothing is permanent.
There is nothing to be proud of.
So don't hate anybody."

Bhima played his *leela* (games). Showing his empty belly, he asked Janen for food. The latter brought some *mandia* and *kasla-dhan* and gave it to him. Bhima said,

'Mother! O mother,
I have no mother to look after me.
I have no brother left to take care of me.
I neither have wings to fly,
No goal as to where to go.
What shall I do with this paddy?
Please give me some cooked food to
Fill my hungry belly with.'

Hearing it, Sanadi-*Janen* ordered her two daughters to bring cooked food. But they refused to cook for the beggar. The mother herself brought some boiled ***mandia*** food, *kandul* and *khursa* and gave it to Bhima. He took the food and pretended to be dead near the buffalo-shed. The two daughters, looking at his condition, blamed their mother for showing undue kindness. They said:

'O mother,
Go and see,
Go and take care of him
He is a hungry man of twelve years
A leper, a man of wild germs,
You fed a man of unknown caste and clan
See, he is dead.
A Dom will not lift him now
A Ghasi will not throw him out.
You took pity on him,
He made our house unsacred
He died in our house.'

But Sanadi-*Janen*, despite her daughters' abuse, sprinkled water on his face and brought him back to consciousness. Janen said, 'you have already got your life, now go to some other village.'

Bhima said haltingly,

'O mother, you have understood me
You have understood my need,
You are my mother Goddess.
So I beg one more thing from you.'

Janen asked, 'What do you need?'

Bhima said,

'you have two flowers in your house.
They are blooming, give me one of them.'

Janen asked: 'What is the flower!'

Bhima said

'They are your daughters,
Please give me either Kondhen Rani or Dumer Rani,
So that she would take care of my disease.'

Hearing this, the two sisters sprang up like two furious cobras and abused Bhima. Sanadi-*Janen* told her two daughters,

'The boy has only expressed his wish,
He has only proposed to one of you,
And he has not snatched you away,

Why are you abusing him?
He has only spoken of his wish.'

Sanadi-Janen said to Bhima

'Dear son, my daughters don't like you.
It would be better if you leave this village.'

Bhima asked her the way in which he could go. Janen said, 'the road to the right leads to Miligidi Banr (cultivation field) and the road to the left leads to Ranchuan (well with golden water), and the road in the middle leads to Niamagiri dongar (a hill).

Bhima started towards Ranchuan. While coming from heaven, he had brought with him his assistants such as eight million diseases, sixty-four million kinds of pain/ disaster, hundred kinds of flies, *Tumdi-bihan-Rog-muna* (a bag of diseases), *Bat-muna* (a bag of rheumatism), *Dukh-muna* (a bag of miseries), *Sukh-muna* (a bag of happiness), *Bhok-muna* (a bag of hunger), *sos-muna* (a bag of thirst), *Kandhni* (tears), *hasni* (laughter), *pangan-nashan* (witch craft and magic), *Japan* (worship), *Burbetal* (a spirit), along with eight *mohinis* and nine *Jalkas*. All these were magical medicines brought by Bhima.

Bhima applied his *mohini-maya* (illusion of attracting a woman by medicine) on Kondhen Rani and Dumer Rani and said, 'Let me see, how you girls will hate me. By this magic, if you do not surrender at my feet, I will burn my moustache.'

Bhima entered the well. The water of the well suddenly dried up. After that, Bhima had his place under the water region, the water drowned him up to base level. Nobody could see him. Bhima waited for the two sisters to come and take their bath so that he could see them.

Meanwhile, the two sisters started to the pond to have their bath. Sanadi advised them to take bath in Ranchuan, and to go to *miligidi banr* (field in the forest) to take food for their father and brother. They applied *rai haldi* and *ban haldi* on their bodies and started to Ranchuan.

On the way Kondhen Rani asked Dumer Rani, 'Sister, if that diseased man appears in this lonely place and troubles us, how can we escape?' Dumer replied, 'We will throw away the pots and run'.

On reaching Ranchuan, they saw an amazing sight. They saw that the well which was usually dry without water, was overflowing. The water of the well was submerging the nearby region and fields. The two sisters were happy that they could have a complete bath; they undressed themselves upto their waist and applied turmeric on their bodies. Finding themselves alone, they undressed completely, applied turmeric and cleaned the dirt from their thighs with a broken *khapri*.

Bhima was waiting for this opportunity. He invoked his father - Pawanwar Khatri - to take away the clothes of the two sisters and place them inside the well. All of a sudden, a violent storm appeared and the girls' clothes disappeared. Trees and creepers were uprooted and thus the storm changed the scene. The two sisters, naked, could not find a place to conceal their youthful bodies and tried to embrace themselves. One

hid herself in a *kendu* (Diospyros melanoxylon) tree, while the other in plantain bushes. Looking at their helpless situation, Bhima requested his father to stop the storm.

Finding themselves fully naked, without clothes, and helpless, the two sisters cried. Kondhen Rani tied *Sial* leaf and Dumer Rani plantain leaf on their waist and breasts. When they were about to start their return home, they heard a furious noise from inside the well. The girls were perplexed and wondered if the village boys were coming to play *Dhabkudi* (a musical instrument) to drive away the monkeys. After sometime when they saw nobody coming, they looked into the well. Surprisingly, they saw the boy with his diseased body. The girls, filled with remorse, said that the one whom they considered *Kira* (insect, germ) could see their *hira* – diamond-like body.

Out of fear they returned home and found their red sarees, which were taken away by the storm. They told their mother everything. They believed that the man must be a divine one.

The two sisters then took boiled rice for their father and brother at ***Miligidi Banr*** (cultivation field). Now Bhima took the form of a leopard, a ***nadia majur**** (a peacock) having the body of nine birds (like *nabagunjara* of Mahabharata). Taking the form of a parrot, he pecked on the nipple of the girls' breasts. Despite Bhima's mischief, they reached the field. When the father and brother went to have their bath before taking their meals, Bhima took advantage of their absence and took the form of an ugly old man and appeared before the girls to frighten them.

(* It is mentioned here as Bhima assuming the form of a leopard, a peacock, and a parrot. This is to show that the form assumed by Bhima may vary depending on the singer's imagination.)

When the *Jani* came, he asked Bhima, 'who are you?'
Bhima said, 'I am a beggar, I have been hungry for a week.'
Jani took pity on him and gave some *mandia* rice.

Bhima took it and said,

'O father, you have saved my life.
How can I repay the debt?
Lend me an axe, to hack out the bushes in your field.'

Looking at his old age and weakened body the two girls laughed at him. But *Jani* said,

'A *jhapi* is known from its clothes and a man's strength is known from his hand.'

Jani gave him an axe. Bhima, as he was an old man, managed to reach Miligidi Banr (cultivation field). He remembered Pawanwar Khatri and requested him to help in cleaning the field.

Bhima invoked his father, 'O father, I will use the axe to clear up the bushes. Let all the bushes of in this field of 24 *kos* (one kos is 3km) width and 24 *kos* length be cleared up with a single stroke of my axe.'

Bhima took the dagger and started digging the earth. Before that he invoked, 'O mother Earth, I am cleaning the earth by touching you with my dagger. Clear the land of 24*kos*

length and 24*kos* width. Let four-finger-deep soil be levelled by the one strike of my dagger. Help me.' Mother Earth helped him and the land was levelled with one stroke of his dagger.

He ordered all the monkeys to clean up the straw, branches, leaves etc. that had fallen on the field. He ordered the boar to dig up the soil to make it fertile. He invited all the animals of the forest to urinate and make the land fertile.

He also brought rain on the land to make it suitable to sow pulses (such as *gurji*, *madia*, *suan*, *kodo*, *kang*, and *kosla*)

In the morning, *Jani* and his son Raspal Majhi saw that the land had been levelled and someone had done this miracle overnight.

Jani called for a meeting at his own village to find the person who had occupied his land without his knowledge. Bhima, disguised as a jharu kondh (an astrologer of the Kondhs) arrived at the meeting, and on being asked by the *Jani* about the problem, answered that all the work had been done for the food offered to the beggar. He also said that the beggar was the son of a Kondh.

Pleased, *Jani* wanted to make Bhima his own son-in-law and perform bride-service in his own house. Both the *Jani* and *Janen* accepted Bhima in their home to make him their son-in-law. But as he was a leper, the two girls did not like him. It is a custom in the Kondh society that during the period of bride-service, the boy, in his would-be father-in-law's house, should please the girl by fulfilling all her needs and demands. Bhima, likewise, fulfilled all the requirements of the girls. He supplied them with leaves, firewood etc.

Discovery of Liquor

Once, while wandering in the jungle, Bhima saw some birds enter the hollow of a *mahul* tree (Bassia Latifolia) actively, but after coming out of the hollow, they danced madly and thereafter slept quietly on the ground. After some time, they came back to their senses and flew away. Bhima discovered liquor from the hollow of the tree and gave it to the Kondhs.

Invention of Iron

Once, to make a plough, a shaft - *kasna* was needed. Bhima took 24 *Bisas* (local measure of iron) of iron to the *Luhra* and asked him to make agricultural implements. The surprised *Luhra* said that it was impossible to make a *kasna* out of 24 *Bisas*, that is, it was too much. Bhima cursed the blacksmith, that despite all his efforts he would remain poor. At this, the blacksmith fell at Bhima's feet and asked him how to melt 24 *bisas* of iron and make a *kasna*. Bhima trained him in the making of a wind machine. By killing a black cow, he made a *hapus*. With the help of this, the blacksmith used to heat the iron ore and make iron implements.

The machine was to fan the fire and heat the iron. From the bone of the cow he made an arrow. Once the arrow left the bow, it never returned. Bhima brought the iron plough and dagger from the blacksmith.

With the plough, the *Jani* could cultivate the land. Jani used two wild buffaloes (*gayalpod*) for ploughing and Bhima sowed the paddy in the field.

Before harvesting, the paddy was likely to dry up owing to lack of rainwater.

Raspal Majhi set fire to the paddy out of anger. But Bhima brought rainwater and put out the fire. Out of the half-burnt paddy, some unburnt paddy became *Kalia*, *Setka*, *Pora* etc.

Gradually, the two sisters were fascinated by the miraculous deeds of Bhima. He knew this, and because he was in disguise (and was looking unattractive on purpose), he now wanted to reveal his real identity and attract the two sisters.

One day the two sisters went to collect *Kendu* and char-berry (fruit of *kendu* tree) from the forest. A handsome youth appeared in front of them and disappeared at once. The two sisters became afraid on seeing such a miraculous scene. They returned home and found that the handsome youth they had seen in the jungle was sleeping in Bhima's room. Kondhen Rani, the elder sister recognized the young man. They were happy to discover that Bhima, whom they hated, was none other than the young man.

Both the sisters fell in love with the bride-servant Bhima. They also expressed their desire to marry him.

But Bhima said, 'Because I have been adopted as a bride-servant in your house, I will marry only one of you. But first of all you have to decide who between the two of you will marry me.'

Kondhen queen immediately replied, 'I will marry you.'

Hearing this Dumer queen, the elder sister, was angry. According to tradition, the elder sister should marry Bhima. Kondhen queen thought of a plan. She said to her sister, 'Let me marry Bhima. On getting married, he will become your brother-in-law, and according to our social system, a person can marry his wife's sister (*sali*) also'. Bhima could understand this and said, 'All right, I will marry both of you.'

The *Anga Jadi Angapatra* found the auspicious date and the marriage was instituted. After the completion of the marriage ceremony, Bhima wanted to take the two sisters and go to heaven. Bhima wished for a terrible storm and rain. The people assembled for the marriage ceremony were disturbed. Huge trees were uprooted and flew in the sky like cotton. When the 'crying ceremony' (ceremony when the bride's family ceremoniously cry when the girl leaves their house and goes with her husband) was going on Bhima took the two sisters under his two arms and flew to the skies.

Jani Budha (the headman) and his wife were crying in despair. Bhima said from the heavens:

'Oh! Jani, don't cry, I am the creator of Kondhs: I am taking your daughters. I am pleased with you. I give you the boon that you can spell my (*Bhima Sidi*) life history and worship me as my Priest.'

Immediately, Bhima created Janendevi (goddess of words) and ordered the Jani to worship her. He also ordered the Janendevi to help the *Jani* (Priest) in memorizing the episodes, if forgotten, while reciting the *Bhima Sidi*.

Bhima looked down at the earth and found that though he lived on the earth he had left no 'symbols'. He saw that except Janinen Dhartuni (earth goddess) and Janen (goddess of words) no other was found. Now Bhima was already in the heaven. So he identified himself as *Sarag* Bhima. He wanted to leave his symbols (*bana*) on the earth. So he took his incarnation according to his series of activities taken up during his stay on the earth. He turned into 12 brothers of Bhima:

1. *Pat* Bhima (Bhima the great)
2. *Baraa* Bhima (Mad Bhima owing to addiction of liquor)
3. *Khunjia* Bhima (mischievous Bhima during his childhood and youth)
4. *Aai* Bhima
5. *Jai* Bhima
6. *Sarag* Bhima (Bhima in the heaven)
7. *Nanglia* Bhima (First ploughman)
8. *Jal* Bhima (Bhima in water)
9. *Thal* Bhima (Bhima on the earth)
10. *Kurthia* Bhima (Idle Bhima)
11. *Rakas* Bhima (Bhima with demonic power)
12. *Sagdia* Bhima (Bhima as a cart man)

From these 12 Bhimas, 84 crore Gods and Goddesses emerged and were worshipped in the Kondh villages.

Kadmadi budhi asked Bhima, 'My dear Son, after leaving the earth, in which form do you want to be worshipped?' Bhima said, 'I want to be worshipped in certain places of my liking. The Gods and Goddesses will be Pidardeo, Padardeo, Des Deo, Rajdeo, and Duladeo; 12 gods together will be known as *Barabhai* Baburai.'

After this, Bhima again started for heaven. While flying, Dumer Rani fall down from his right armpit. Bhima said, 'you had no love for me, so you fell down even when I had given you shelter. You had also ill-treated me when I was in the guise of a leper. May you be a big tree and the fruits you bear be full of worms like that of a leper.'

Dumer Rani cried and said, 'Unknowingly, I had ill-treated you but when I knew you, I have loved you. So please don't curse me.'

Hearing this, Bhima took pity on her and turned her into Goddess Dumer Rani. 'You will be known as Dumer Rani. People while eating your fruit will tuck the fruit in their hair with reverence', said Bhima. After that the fig tree turned into a divine tree. People, while eating the fig fruit, invoke Dumer Rani. (Dumer is known as *udumbar* tree with Vedic significance.)

While descending from heaven to earth, Bhima came down with the help of two strings, a golden string and a silver string, and he stepped on the *Palasa* tree. People put

two strings on a *palasa* tree and believe that Bhima descends to the earth through the golden and silver strings.

The Doms, musicians of the Gods, perform the *Bhima Vadya*, a special music concert, for Bhima when invoking his spirit. Kondhen Rani, the beloved of Bhima is also worshipped with Bhima in the village *gudi*.

(Dolagobinda Bisi, Researcher and Gurbaru Bogua, Chheliamal, Kalahandi.)

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Kondh Epic

Nangmati Rajaphulia

In Khariar state, there is a mountain called Chaura Donger. It is believed that 84 Gods and Goddesses have chosen their abodes in Chaura Donger. There were many birds and animals in this forest.

Padman Singh, the king of Khariar, frequently came to this forest to hunt. One day, he entered into the thick jungle for a hunt and could not find his way back; he rested in the jungle with his followers. Everybody slept at night except the king. At midnight, he saw a flash of light in the jungle. He picked up his gun and stepped forward towards the light. He reached the light and found a huge serpent *Mani Nag* (a serpent with a gemstone on her hood). The serpent was sheltering a beautiful girl under its hood. The king tried to shoot the serpent, but the gun did not work. The king watched this scene the whole night. In the morning he tried to take the girl from the serpent, but failed.

The king brought the incident to the notice of the *Patmajhi* (headman) of Liad village. *Patmajhi* came with the king to see the girl with the serpent. The king said, 'O Majhi, please do something. I want to take this girl'. Majhi agreed to this and invoked his clan Goddess. The goddess agreed to give the daughter Nangmati to the king who wanted to bring up the girl as his foster daughter; king Padman Singh already had a son called Rajaphulia.

One day, Rajaphulia went to Manjher village and crossed the Udanti river. He took all his ploughmen with him. Everyone was engaged in planting paddy saplings in the field. Rajaphulia was watching the horse. Meanwhile, Nangmati came to the field carrying food for her brother. Both of them ate the food.

At once, the rainwater came and the water level in the river increased. Rajaphulia's village was on the other side of the river. So he immediately sent all the ploughmen and labourers back to the village in a boat. Nangmati was waiting alone on the other side. Rajaphulia, after sending everybody, came with the boat to get Nangmati.

The water in the river kept increasing. Rajaphulia and Nangmati sat on the boat. With the water increasing, Rajaphulia could not row and lost control over the boat. The boat capsized in the current and was washed downstream from the Udanti river to the Teli river and crossed many miles. Finally, the boat reached a village called Bindhani.

Two brothers from the village had come to the river to collect wooden logs from the flooded river. They thought the boat to be a piece of log. So the elder brother said that whoever fetched the log would own it. Both of them swam towards the log. They saw that it was a boat and in the boat a boy and a girl were sitting and crying.

They rescued Rajaphulia and Nangmati and took them to their house. The elder brother had an eye on Nangmati, but the younger brother said that he had saved the girl by bringing the boat. Both of them quarrelled and finally, the younger brother killed his elder brother and married Nangmati. Rajaphulia married the younger brother's sister.

(Gurbaru Parghania (Kondh) and Sukru Jani Chheliamal, Kalahandi)

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Manduka Majhi

(Distribution of land among the Kondh tribe in Kalahandi is determined by the distribution of their clan. The Kondh tribe has many clans such as Ganja, Gobria, Luha, Milki, and Gohaka. Each clan has its own land territory and each territory-clan is called *chak*. For example, the Ganja clan settlement is known as 'Ganja chak'.

Kalahandi is known as kandhan desh. Accordingly, the lands are identified with each clan and they enjoy ownership of their land and administrative power.)

The Kandh Beska clan had settled in Bhanpur village. This was the centre of Beska *chak*. The village headman was known as *Patmajhi*. Manduka, the only son of *Patmajhi*, was very mischievous, obstinate, and troublesome. *Patmajhi* was very powerful by his tantric activities. He would achieve his goal by the grace of his clan deity. Manduka was young and had reached marriageable age. *Patmajhi* searched for a bride. But Manduka did not agree to any proposal. His only choice was his maternal uncle's daughter. His uncle belonged to the Gahaka clan. According to Kondh tradition, marriage between Beska and Gahaka clans is forbidden as both of them are *Dudbhai*. So Manduka's father, *Patmajhi* refused to get a bride from the Gahaka clan.

When Manduka did not listen to his father and pleaded for his uncle's daughter, *Patmajhi* set out for the village Chichirla. He called the maternal uncle to his presence and set the proposal before them. They were surprised at this vague proposal, and expressed that if they gave their daughter to Manduka, their clan brothers would ostracize them. They would be socially boycotted, and be denied water and fire from the village. Therefore, they refused to give their daughter to Manduka in marriage.

Patmajhi was disappointed. He returned to his village and explained it to Manduka. On hearing this, Manduka was terribly angry and called his messenger and said, *Rattar Je Ghirni, Kondhar je Dharni* which means 'the wheel is the support for the chariot, likewise goddess Dharnimata supports the Kondhs'.

Manduka touched mother goddess Earth and vowed, 'Holding the earth in my hand, I promise, I will gather all people of 30 *Pataks* (castes). The *Jani* will declare the human sacrifice festival *meriah* and I will sacrifice my two uncles and tie their heads on

the marriage altar and marry their daughters.' He sent the messengers to all parts of the *chak*.

Manduka called his messenger and said, 'Enter into my uncle's house and crawl on the rafter of the roof at night. At midnight, fall on them when they are sleeping. When you fall on them, they will think you are a thief and chase you. You then run towards the *Gudi*. I will be hiding there with an axe. While chasing you, they will come inside the *gudi* when I will kill them.'

The messenger agreed to the plan and affirmed that he will act accordingly. He went to the village of Manduka's maternal uncle.

At night, the messenger entered the room of Manduka's uncle. He crawled up to the roof of the house and at midnight fell on Manduka's uncles. They got up and out of fear, for self-security, threw on the messenger, the fire burning in the *umhei* placed beside the cot. The messenger's body was burnt. He entered the pig's shed to hide. Manduka's uncle called all his men and asked them to catch hold of the messenger. Then they lit the house and recognized him. They knew why he had entered their house. Out of fear, the messenger disclosed everything.

Hearing this, Manduka's uncle surrounded Dukribudhi's *gudi*. They captured Manduka and tied him to the *Dharni Khuta* – sacrificial post. Then they asked the messenger to prepare an arrow made of a bone and ordered him to shoot it at Manduka. The messenger shot the arrow, but it did not harm Manduka. Manduka said, 'the shooting of your arrow is just like the bite of an ant'. Saying this, he used his strength and broke the rope to pieces. He freed himself and picked up an axe to kill his uncles. But his hands froze. The uncles said, 'Oh Dharnimata, Earth Goddess. If you are really omnipresent, please drink his blood. The victim has come to you on his own. We have not forced him to come.'

He has come to your sacrificial post himself, for which we are not responsible. Then the uncles picked up the axe and struck the neck of their nephew. The head of Manduka was offered to Dharnimata. Since then, the Kondhs have been offering their own nephews as *meriah* - human sacrifice to their Dharnimata.

Garbaur Parghania (Bogua)

Chheliamal, Kalahandi. And Sukri Jani, Teacher

Interpretation

There are three types of sung narratives among the Kondhs: the creation myth, epics of Kondh heroes, and epics based on human sacrifice.

Gova Utra - Creation Myth

The Gova Jani is the main priest singer. Three or four young singers from the same community accompany him. *Sadki* is played by one of the singers and the main singer sings the myth. Others repeat the main line till the main singer recites a new line. Three priests named *Gova Jani* (the main priest who sings the mythical song), *Jog-Jani* (the priest

who makes the worship place sacred on an auspicious day), and *Khut-Jani* (the priest who rears the buffalo and ties it to a wooden post for sacrifice) perform their respective roles. *Jog Jani* observes the day-to-day activities of the buffalo sacrifice for a month. *Khut Jani* ties up the identified buffalo for sacrifice and rears it upto a year before the actual sacrifice. The story is about the deluge on earth and the rescue of the first progenitor of the Kondhs by the supreme god.

A seven-days-long ritual takes place during a buffalo sacrifice in a Kondh village; the fourth day is dedicated to the recitation of the creation myth – *gova utra*.

Kondh Creation Myth

The Kondh creation myth is known as *gova utra*. The Gova Jani, priest-cum-myth singer, sings the *Junam khena Puran* – creation myth in verse form. The sacred narrative is performed from 8.o' clock at night until sunrise, and after the myth is complete, a buffalo is sacrificed at the altar of goddess earth. The buffalo sacrifice ceremony takes place once every 12 years in a Kondh territory (*chak*).

The creation myth consists of two parts. The first part is related to the great deluge on earth and the origin of man, nature, and earth, and creation of the first progenitor (normally brother-sister incest and creation of mankind). Although the first part deals with the primitive culture of the Kondhs, many primitive symbols of economic life as well as the social stratifications among the Kondhs are narrated in the myth.

The second part of the *Janam khena Puran* deals with the origin of Lakshmi (paddy) and the cultivation of paddy by Mahadeo. The later interpolation of the nature myth with the culture epic (*Lakshmi purana* or influence of the *Vrambanda Purana*) is found in the *gova utra* song.

The first part of *gova utra* song deals with the origin of the earth the Kondhs. The events of deluge, creation of earth, union of *Nirakar* with *Adimata*, birth of the Kondh, and their sustenance is narrated in this text.

The Kondh couple witnessed the next deluge. The Kondhs' meeting with a talking deer while hunting and the talking deer's prediction of the deluge takes place in this episode. The Kondh put his son and daughter in a gourd with food for 12 years. After the deluge, *Nirakar* found this brother and sister in the deluge when he wanted to create human being on the earth. God separated the son and daughter for 12 years and then disfigured them with an attack of small pox. Unable to recognize each other they united and the 12 Kondhs took birth.

The next episode is the social stratification of the Kondhs, which starts with the migration from Nandpur–Sankarduar to southern Orissa. The Doms and Gaurs assisted in the migration of the Kondhs. There was a conflict between the Gonds and the Kondhs over the distribution of land. The Gonds used earth (mud) as a signifier of their land, which got washed away with the rainwater and their evidence was lost during the rainy season. But the Kondhs used stone, which was available to establish that they have the land, thus demarcating the land from the Gonds' by the symbol they used to

identify the land. Thus, the landowner was determined with the indigenous proof they produced.

The distribution of gods and goddess has also taken place, along with the distribution of land, according to the clans, which reveals that gods and goddesses also have a genealogy in accordance with the Kondh clans. This part of the Kondh civilization was full of supernatural beliefs and a struggle for survival in the forest. The Kondh settlement came next by the establishment of a new village and the beginning of cultivation. This part is the socio-economic development of the Kondhs in Kalahandi, which signifies their pre-agricultural state. Their migratory nature of life, dependence on forest and creating new paths, and settling in a new village by fighting with other tribes symbolizes their nomadic life.

The *Gova*—essence of the myth is related to the remote past of the Kondh settlement. Although the Kondhs believe in common ancestry, they apply the Kondh myth to the locality they live in and the kinship relations they have. They are distributed over many a clan. Each clan has its own occupation.

The second part of the *Gova* song is the churning of the sea from which Goddess Lakshmi takes her birth. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and is also the symbol of paddy. The cultivators, owing to the similarity in colour, associate paddy with gold. Here, it is found that the Kondhs, after adopting cultivation as their prime occupation, have adopted the Hindu way of worshipping the Goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. The concept of *Devata* and *Asura* is also reflected in their narratives along with their local myths.

The churning of the sea by the *Devatas* and the *Asuras* is symbolically represented in the ritual performance of buffalo sacrifice.

The creation of earth, birds, animals, mountains, trees, rivers and so on are narrated in the Kondh portion related to the churning of the ocean. The killing of *Medu Asura* (Madhukaitava) by the goddess and the creation of earth is an influence of the Sanskrit texts.

The origin of paddy and its cultivation is described in the narrative. It is found in the ritual performance of the buffalo sacrifice when a basket full of paddy is placed at the *gudi*. It is believed that when the *gova* song is recited, the paddy in the basket overflows and the excess paddy automatically flows to the ground; this is regarded as symbolically auspicious. This ensures ample harvest in the forthcoming years.

The two parts of the myths represent two different periods of Kondh stratification. One is on their origin, migration, and settlement, and the other on their cultivation of paddy with the settled agriculturists. The stages from a nomadic nature to settled farmers form the social history of the Kondhs.

The myth and the ritual have a symbolic relationship. Two bamboo poles are erected and atop the bamboo poles two gourds are hung. Three eggs are placed near the Earth Goddess. The Earth Goddess – Dharnimata is worshipped and to appease her, the buffalo is sacrificed. In course of time the priests associated the Durga-Mahishasura myth

with the worship of earth Mother goddess Dharnimata. The symbolic representation of Durga-Mahishasrua myth is in the buffalo sacrifice in the ritual place – *Sadar gudi.* The natural myth is associated with the purana texts, which may be classified as in the following table.

NATURE (LOCAL MYTH) PRE-VEDIC WORLD VIEW	CULTURE (SANSKRIT MYTH) ARYAN WORLDVIEW
Earth Mother Goddess *Adimata* (first mother)	Durga
Nirakar, Adipita (Niranjan)	NidaVishnu
Jadan Budha	Sun God
Wind / rain	Bhima
Crow	Garuda (Vishnu's vehicle)
Mahadeo	Shiva
Dhartimata	Parvati
Buffalo	Mahishasura
Tama- Khuria pod (a buffalo with copper-coloured hooves)	Tamra, Chikyura, Mahishasura (three demons of Chandi Purana)
Paddy, gold	Goddess Lakshmi
Sprouting of paddy	Birth of Lakshmi

This shows how the nature-myth of the primitive Kondhs has been reinterpreted with Hindu mythology by those Kondhs who have been exposed to other cultures.

From Myths to Social Rules

It is found among the Kondh people that the epic and mythical songs become proverbs and figures of speech for use in different social contexts. This is primarily to validate the social rules, maintain customs, and reiterate the values and morals according to the Kondh worldview.

Social and customary laws are found reflected in the Kondh myth. It is found that hundreds of proverbs available in oral communication in a social context are sung in the *gova* myth. Almost all the proverbs are drawn from tradition and social customs. Each proverb bears a story of Kondh social rules, practices, customs and historical experience. Some of them are

Khut kata Gond
Padar basa kondh
The Gond cleaned the jungle and the Kondh
Settled down thus forming a village.

Kondh, Kurmel, Matirdub
Jen ne basle senne subh
Kondh, Kurmel mouse, and the grass of the earth
Make auspicious wherever they are seen.

Ma, Mausir pila Gond aru Kondh
The Gonds and the Kondhs are two sons of two sisters.
Elder is Gond and younger is Kondh.
Pat bandha budaka
Kudedhara tuduka
Jhidia sermelka

The Kondhs, role is to coronate the Naga Kings in Kalahandi. When Badaka Kondh was tying the turban of the prince, Tuduka Kondh was taking the Prince on his lap, and the Sermelka Kondh was offering his daughter to the prince of Kalahandi.

Rather je Ghirni Aru
Kondhar je Dharni
The chariot is strong when the wheel is there
A Kondh is strong when his mother-earth is there.

Kondhar barag aru Dhanar barag
Akasar tarake ken kui parlia.
Who can count the stars of the sky?
Who can count the kinds of paddy in the field?
Who can count the clans of the Kondhs?
Can anyone?

Initially, the proverbs were part of socio-religious conventions. But gradually they became the regulator of social rules and customs. Many lines of *Gova* song are proverbs and have their social function. When the community meeting is held to resolve a conflict between two parties, these proverbs are used as examples from past experience. It is believed that their ancestors have witnessed similar situations and therefore they have experienced life and left such a treasure of a proverb. So why would they ignore the proverb and invite problems? Thus, they maintain the tradition of proverbs as their customary law.

Eulogy

The Kondh priest is responsible for the well-being of the village. Therefore he maintains austerities and appeases the gods and goddesses. The entire visible and invisible world around the village is considered as sacred. The rivers, mountains, flora, and fauna are considered as the greater universe. The animate and inanimate interact with each other. The priest understands nature. There is an intrinsic relationship between the birds, animals, and nature, and human beings. Human beings are not a separate entity and have no meaning when set apart from the entire world they live in. Therefore, in the Kondh eulogy, the rivers, mountains, birds, and animals have a special role to play. The totems have a close relationship with man. Nature communicates with the humans. Human beings relate nature with the supernatural. This is expressed in the eulogy of

the Kondh priest. There is an earnest prayer to the Goddess to save the earth and nature as well as human life.

The Gova Jani invokes:

Oh ma,
Khute Kath hou – let the dry log sprout green leaves,
Mati Bhat hou – let the earth bear paddy,
Let the empty pot of the widow be filled up.
Let a handful of rice, be pot-full of rice.
Let the dry tree bloom with green leaves,
Let the childless woman beget a child,
Let the pot-full of paddy become a cartful.

Bhima Sidi

Bhima Sidi is a fusion of Hindu mythology and local imagination of the Kondh culture. This is described in the mythical epic of *Bhima*. The incarnation of Bhima in the earth is a synthesis of Hindu mythology and a tribal narrative.

The story of Bhima can be summarized thus. Bhima – formless in heaven – came to the earth to enjoy human life. He came to the earth to marry the daughters of a Kondh headman. He appeared in the village headman's house in the guise of a servant, subsequently accepted by the village headman and his wife to perform bride-service to one of his two daughters. Bhima cleaned the forest, levelled the land, invented liquor and iron, got rain from the heaven, and cultivated paddy. After that, he went to heaven with his wife Kondhen. Because the younger sister, who was in love with Bhima, could not go to heaven she became a fig tree.

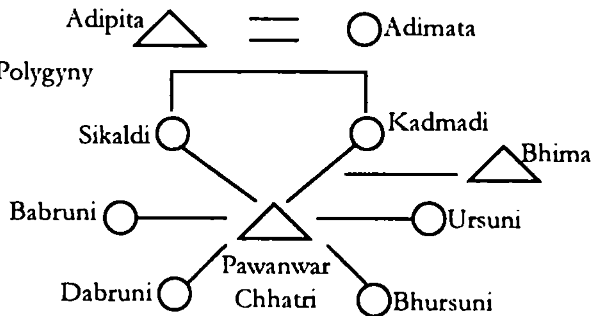
Birth of Bhima

Bhima was formless. He was powerful. He created the universe that the Kondhs believe in. Conceived like Christ and born like Krishna, Bhima took his form in the womb of a woman (Perrani devi - pregnant goddess) and during the seventh conception(after repeated abortions), he was born. Nothing was mentioned about his father. The indication of his father perhaps is omitted because of the lack of understanding of biological paternity or the relationship of sex and conception of a child by women. This was the level of biological awareness among the Paleolithic people. Another premise may be that the divine hero always chose to take his birth from a virgin mother, pure and sacred, in comparison with the impure human being. This was signified when Bhima's mother refused to allow Bhima to take birth in the human society. This signifies that God is always pure and sacred.

When Bhima took his birth again in the womb of Kadmadi Budhi, his father was Pawanwar Chhatri (Vayu God). In Hindu mythology, Bhima, as the second of Pandya, is the son of Vayu god. The role of Vayu—the supreme god, the father of Bhima—has the highest power in order of strength. Like any other hero's birth, Bhima's birth is also from a virgin mother whose father is invisible.

Types of Family

1. Practice of Polygyny
2. Practice of Sororate Polygyny



Before Bhima's incarnation, there was a Kondh settlement on the earth. Therefore, Bhima expressed his desire to his mother to be born on earth to marry the two daughters of Urmadijani, the headman of Beskapadar village. Bhima said to his mother that after marrying, the two sisters he would bring them to heaven.

In reply, Bhima's divine mother highlighted a good number of unhealthy practices which prevailed among the Kondhs:

1. They do not wash their mouth after eating,
2. They do not wash their hands after going to the toilet,
3. They eat buffaloes and pigs,
4. They are impure - not the right kind of clan to establish a marital relationship with.

With promises to avoid unhealthy practices, Bhima descended from heaven to earth through a golden and a silver string. The place where he descended was a dense forest and there he created a woman with supernatural powers. The woman created 12 different forests namely Bhavan, Bhuban, Fuban, Chuban, Khaban, Hakarban, Duliban, Kadliban, Swetban, Silban, Gilban, and Mohaliban. Prior to the thick human settlement in Kalahandi there were 12 kinds of forests, each having its own significance. Kalahandi was known as Mahakantara - great forest - in the ancient history of India (Singh Deo JP:1987).[3]

Bhima created birds and animals in the forests. On his way to Beskapadar, he collected information about the headman and his house such as, the father was Urmadijani, the mother was Sanadi Janen, their son was Raspal Majhi and their two daughters were Dumer Rani and Kondhen Rani

Jani had 12 houses with 24 rooms in each house. For the buffaloes he had 12 sheds; *Jani* was a donor, rich and powerful in the locality. It is found in the oral narratives that, invariably the heroine's father is a rich headman and the hero is poor, ugly, and an orphan. Bhima, as an orphan and in the guise of a leper, appeared in the house of the Jani and played his game (*leela*). The actions of Bhima in disguise can also be compared with the *Kumara Sambava* epic in which Shiva in disguise appeared before Parvati to test her devotion. In folk tales and epics, heroes in disguise are a key motif and after a lot

of tests the heroine discovers that the ugly man is a divine hero or a handsome young man.

Bhima had to pass all the tests and the difficult tasks assigned by the Kondh headman and he was found to be the inventor of liquor, provider of rainwater, a good ploughman, a good cultivator, and so on. In the narratives of Bhima in other tribes such as Gadaba, Gond, Bhunjia, and Koya of Andhra Pradesh, Chhatishgarh and western Orissa, Bhima is worshipped as a rain god.[4] (Elwin 1954)

Bhima is portrayed as a culture hero in the oral narratives. His deeds can be compared to those of a supernatural hero, who by dint of his miraculous deeds achieved anything that he wanted. Therefore, he is portrayed equally as a culture hero and also as a mythical hero. As an epic hero, he has been able to show his physical power while as a mythical hero he has shown his supernatural power.

Cultural Context of Bhima Worship

The marriage of Bhima and Kondhen has a religious significance in most of the tribal villages. Kalahandi is a drought-prone area and scarcity of rainwater affects the single-crop cultivation. Paddy is mainly cultivated by the farmers. As there is no facility for water irrigation, the people of Kalahandi depend on rainwater and worship the rain god Bhima. People believe in the symbiotic relationship of man, nature, and spirit. The presence of the spirit in living beings (possession of spirit in man) and also in the inanimate (stone, air, water, earth) reveals the relationship between man and nature.

In a tribal society, deification is done only after the death of a person. Besides nature worship, they believe in the worship of the spirit after the death of a person and therefore, ancestor worship is prevalent. Similarly, when a virgin Kondh girl is offered to Bhima in the village, she is to remain unmarried as she is considered as the divine wife of Bhima. She becomes Gurumai - female priest - of the community and acquires the esoteric knowledge from the priests. She sings the *Bhima Sidi* and invokes Bhima. After she dies, she is installed as a goddess by the priests - as the divine wife of Bhima - and is worshipped beside the stone sculpture of Bhima. Such a case occurred in 1985 when a Gurumai passed away in the village of Mahulbhata. On being asked about her, the priest told me about the process of her deification as Kondhen, the sacred wife of Bhima, who is worshipped in the stone image.

The priest narrated the event thus:

In Mahulbhata village, the Kondh priest had a daughter. Earlier, the Kondhs sacrificed their own sons to earth goddess. It was known as *Meriah*. That year there was no rain. *Jani* instituted the Bhima ritual. Bhima possessed a shaman and asked the *Jani* to offer his daughter in marriage, or there would be no rains. The *Jani*, for the wellbeing of the people, offered his only daughter Kondhen in marriage to Bhima, the village god. Kondhen remained a virgin, lived like a sacred married woman and was identified as a Gurumai (virgin priest). After that, she had the authority to invoke Bhima for rain.

When the Kondhen died, she was worshipped in a stone image next to Bhima in the *gudi* under a fig tree.[5]

Normally, Bhima worship is an agricultural festival to ensure ample rain and harvest. This is celebrated by both the tribal and non-tribal farmer communities. So, the distribution and sharing of the Bhima myth is prevalent across the locality. It is believed that Mahadeo started cultivation on the earth and Bhima was the first ploughman to assist him. Worship of Bhima takes place for seven days in the Kondh community. Two Gurumais (women priests) perform the *Bhima sidi* (mythical epic) for seven days and seven nights to complete the cycle. The most important aspect of the ritual is that it is the oral performance that symbolically represents the complex ritual. The Bhunjia community also celebrates the ritual for 15 days. In each village, Bhima is worshipped as the rain god, symbolically represented in a stone beside the *matimata* - earth mother goddess.

The Bogua and the Gurumai narrate the mythical epic, and the ritual performance is strictly followed under the directions of the Gurumai.

In Kalahandi adjoining Chhatishgarh and Andhra Pradesh, Bhima is imagined as 12 brothers, each of them being assigned a task and accordingly identified with a name. The eldest is Mandal Bhima and rest of them are Bahara Bhima (inventor of liquor) Nanglia Bhima (ploughman Bhima) etc.

Discovery of Liquor

The discovery of liquor by Bhima is another area of study. The *Kumbha Jataka*[6] (Jataka tales) of Buddhist folklore resembles the discovery of liquor found in the narratives of the Gonds, the Kondhs, and the Bhunjia. The common motifs found in the *Jataka* tales of the remote past (of 2500 years ago) and the present time, extends the continuity of cultural thought in Indian oral literature. The *Kumbha jataka* tells

> Buddha was in Jetavana. He narrated the conditions of 500 women friends of Vishakha who were intoxicated and uncontrolled. Buddha, witnessing their condition, said to Vishakha, in Baranasi city (present Benaras) when king Brahmadutta was reigning, there was a hunter named Sura. One day he went to the Himalayan forest and found that there was a hollow in a tree. Many fruits dropped into the hollow of the tree and the rainwater also had accumulated in the hollow. The parrots from the nearby *salidhana* came to the hollow of the tree and drank water from the hollow after which lost their senses. After a while, they got up and flew away. There was a similar effect even on the beasts.

Sura was watching the birds and he tasted the water from the hollow and he was also intoxicated. He collected the water and first offered it to the sage Varuna. Thus the liquor was named *varuni*. Because it was discovered by Sura, the liquor was named *Suraa* (Satpathy 1989).

Similar stories are found among the Mundari and Dravidian language groups reflecting similarity in motifs. The Gond myth of discovering liquor was that, there was

once a marriage festival and the people who participated in the marriage did not obtain any enjoyment *(rasa)*. Every one prayed to Mahadeo. Mahadeo sent Bhima in search of *rasa* (liquid) and Bhima discovered that the birds entered into the hollow of the mahul tree after which they lost their senses; some time later they got back their sense and flew away. Bhima tasted the water in the hollow and he felt the need for sensual pleasure. Then he came to the marriage with the liquor which made everybody want to sing and dance. Thereafter, the Gonds learnt to have liquor during marriage ceremonies. Without liquor they consider the marriage boring and tasteless.

A similar story is found among the Santals of northern Orissa too. This indicates how discovery of liquor is important to the tribal society.

Invention of Iron

Extraction of iron from iron ore in the jungle is another ancient technology which symbolizes that without iron implements, cultivation would not have been possible by mankind. It is necessary to mention that the blacksmith is the first inventor of iron and they believe that they are the *Viswakarma* (creator of the Universe). Viswakarma is a mythical God who created the heaven in one night.[7] He sharpened the iron axe of Agni (fire god). The blacksmith – Lohras of Kalahandi – identify themselves as the descendants of the mythical god Viswakarma.

> 'Viswakarma was seen in the Vedas, he is regarded as the creator and the preserver, but later on he became a valued servant who fulfils at the behest of his superiors.'[8]

Invention of iron in forest culture is a major indicator of cultural change. Iron was helpful to man in exploiting the natural resources. This was again validated through the gods and goddesses. The Kondh *mantra* (sacrifice myth) reveals that the weapon is responsible for the sacrifice and not the people who provided the victim (*Meriah*).

Therefore, when Bhima invented iron, it was used as a weapon, agricultural implement, and also as some household apparatus. It is mentioned in the myth that Bhima gave the blacksmith the wind machine to create fuel for the fire and melt the iron. Therefore, the blacksmith plays a major role in performing their duties in a village's religious functions. There is a day during the rainy season, the dark moon of *Sravana* (August), when the blacksmith puts a nail on the wooden door (*duarabandha*) to ensure that no evil enters the house. This is known as *jatar maheli*, a ritual observed by the Lohar community for the wellbeing of the whole village.

The blacksmith is known as the bearer of magical and supernatural powers, mediating between the tribes that have many occupation groups. They sing the glory of their myth, which is closely related to the Gond, Kondh, and Bhunjia myths. The Lohars are believed to be the tantric people of Kalahandi. Luhakati Lohrani is one of the seven tantric sisters of western Orissa. It is found that the *mantra* (hymn), *tantra* (esoteric knowledge), and *jantra* (machine) are practised by the Lohars of Kalahandi. *Jantar maheli* is their major festival in which they worship their clan gods and recite the

myths of Jatar Maheli hero. They also sing the origin myth of the Lohars during the *Jatar Maheli* festival. Invention of the wind machine, getting the skin of the cow to cover the machine etc. is described in the festival. In Kalahandi, weapons are worshipped as the symbols of gods and goddesses. So the Kondh, in their eulogy to the goddess, claim that they are not really offering anything, it is the goddess symbolized by the weapon, who is eating the victim (*Itakanda tinjim jane*).

Purity and Pollution

Birth of a hero: Purity of body:

A hero cannot take his birth like an ordinary mortal. So, Bhima took birth by tearing the belly of his heavenly mother. He thought while in his mother's womb that all parts of the body have pollution such as ear dirt, eye dirt, nose dirt, vaginal dirt, and anal dirt. Even taking birth through the mouth is impure as there is leftover saliva (*uchhista*). Thus, to remain pure from bodily pollution, Bhima tore his mother's belly and came out as a hero, escaping the ten polluting organs of human beings. It postulates the purity of Gods in comparison with human beings. The hero's supernatural capability is shown before the actual birth took place.

The creation of gods or goddesses from the hero's dirt also signifies the same. The hero turned into 12 Bhimas. The worm in the fig tree (allude to *Bhima Sidi* where Dumer Rani is converted to a fig tree) is metaphorically compared to a woman of evil mind full of evil thoughts.

Influence of Written Text in Kondh Culture

Co-existence of culture in Kalahandi and adoption of Oriya myths as the sacred texts among the educated Kondhs has led to an influence of the myth of the Hindus on the nature myths of the Kondhs. The *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Harivamsa, Chandi Purana* and *Shiva Puran* have influenced the Kondh priests.

Nangmati Rajaphulia

The Kondh epic *Nangmati Rajaphulia* is found among the Bogua-Kondh ethnic singers of Kalahandi. The Bogua-Kondh bard narrates the tragic incest between the brother and sister. The same story is also present among the Dom community in Kalahandi as the *Mardabu raja geet*. As described, Nangmati is a serpent-maiden discovered by the Chauhan king of Khariar, Raja Padman Singh. The Raja adopted Nangmati as his foster daughter.

The brother and sister were floating on a boat in the flooded river and two brothers saved them. The younger brother killed the elder brother and married Nangmati. Rajaphulia married the sister of Nangmati's husband. Although this is a weak story, it reveals the marriage relationship between the Nagas and the Chauhans in Khariar and Kalahandi.

Another version of Nangmati is found, in which Nangmati unknowingly had an incestuous relation with her brother and committed suicide after she realized.

The epic line of Nangmati emphasizes the number of gods and goddesses as narrated, physical geography namely mountains, rivers, availability of precious stones, river–site, cultivation and flood situation, immediate rescue, and also the royal ethics (*raja dharma*) of how the king and the headman looks after their subjects. The mountain is called Chaura dongar and as described, is a holy space owing to the presence of the 484 gods and goddess. The family tree of gods and goddesses in relation to their worshipper clans need to be studied, in view of adoption and distribution of gods and goddesses by the Kondh clans around the Chaura mountain. The Chaura mountain is a rich depository of minerals and precious gem stones.

According to the narration of the singer, King Padman Singh used to go hunting. In one incident, with the help of the village headman, Patmajhi of Liad village, he satisfied the clan goddess and took his daughter Nangmati as his foster daughter. However, it may be interpreted differently as, Patmajhi belongs to the *Maninang* clan which is of royal lineage and somehow higher in status compared with the other Kondh clans. Second, when the king smelled the availability of precious stones which is symbolically represented in the form of *mani-nag* (*mani* means precious stone, *nag* means serpent), the king had an idea to encroach into the territory of Patmajhi. Therefore, he made a plan to establish a relationship and expressed his desire to the Patmajhi that he is daughterless, so he would like to take Patmajhi's daughter as his foster daughter.

As a result, Patmajhi, in fulfilling all rites associated with the process of fostership, handed over his daughter to the king on the consent of his clan goddess.

The second part of the narration speaks about river-site cultivation in the village Manjher, which narrates about the river Udanti. Rajaphulia daringly saved his subjects during the flood. But Rajaphulia and Nangmati had no hopes of being rescued and they were taken away by the river current and they reached river Tel. Interestingly, the brother and sister were rescued by two brothers of a village. The two brothers quarrelled between themselves to marry Nangmati. Finally, the younger brother killed his elder brother and married Nangmati. Later, Rajaphulia married the younger brother's sister.

Here a marriage rule was set up, which may be labelled as exchange marriage. In one version, while the brother was the last among all to come to the bank of the river with his sister, he indulged in an incestuous act in the boat and was caught. The sister committed suicide. Maybe the storyteller, in another version, changed the story and deleted the brother-sister incest and introduced the exchange marriage to refine the story. The Kondh audience now disagree with this and sometimes criticize the brother-sister story. Because it is a legend associated with a locality, this is confined to the Desia Kondhs of Kalahandi and Bolangir only.

Manduka Majhi

Manduka Majhi is a story of rival kinsmen. The Kondhs sacrificed their nephews at the altar of Goddess Earth for a good harvest. The rivalry of Kot Beska Kandh with his kin Gahaka clan is narrated in this epic, and the conflict was for violating the kinship rule.

The story of Manduka Majhi is directed towards the formation of marriage rules and incest taboo among the Kondhs and it also highlights the clan distribution and its territory. The Kondh priests narrate the distribution of land territory according to the clan in the *Gova Utra* myth. The occupation of the Kondhs also determines the name of the clan. According to the narration, each clan territory represents a clan and the same clan enjoys complete rights over the available resources within the territory which is termed *chak*. The resource boundary was also treated as the administrative zone of each clan.

The reason for conflict between the two clans was the prohibition of marriage alliances between the two clans. However, Manduka's indecent proposal that violated the Kondh marriage rule was the root and origin of this narration. There are a few clan names mentioned in the narrative, namely Ganja, Gobria, Milki, Gahaka, and Beska. Manduka belonged to the Beska clan, whereas, his maternal uncle belonged to the Gahaka clan. Manduka had a strong desire to marry his uncle's daughter, which was against the Kondh's social rules and customs. Manduka, somehow, convinced his father who was also against this proposal. But he had to go to Manduka's uncle and ask for his daughter's hand for Manduka, in the presence of the clan members. They rejected the proposal outright. This irked Manduka and he promised to kill his uncles and marry his uncle's daughter.

Manduka exercised his plan with the help of a friend, but could not succeed. On the other hand, he was caught and beheaded by his uncles at the sacrificial post, and thus offered to *Dharnimata*.

Hence, to draw conclusions out of the story, three important clues are to be explained:

i. Kondh marriage rules;

ii. Incest taboo;

iii. The nature of punishment to the ones who deviate.

In all societies, there are some prohibitions on mating between certain kinsmen or from certain social groups. As sexual access is one of the most important regulations accorded by marriage, incest taboos affecting prohibition of marriage as well as among certain kinds.

The inferences are

1. According to Kondh marriage rule, marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited.

2. Marriage with maternal uncle's daughter or son is strictly prohibited and the relationship is treated as brother and sister, which results in an incest taboo.

3. Breaking social rules and customs means, any deviation in marriage rules is seriously viewed and even leads to beheading as was in Manduka's case.

4. The eternal rivalry between maternal uncle and the nephew is found in both oral and written literature.

Features of Kondh Epics and Mythology

Kondh Worldview

The Kondh priest *Jani* is the mediator between God and humans. His purity saves the village and community from disaster and his pollution can devastate the village. *Dharnimata* is the eternal mother who allows human beings to survive. Whatever—fruits, flowers, man, birds and animals are the spit of the earth mother goddess. There is no distinction between a man and an animal when a sacrifice is offered to the goddess, because all of them are her creation. The sun god - *Dharam devta* and earth goddess *Dharnimata* are the causes of creation and preservation. Kondh priest sings:

'Let the rice be filled in the widow's house.
Let the dry tree bloom with branches
Let the childless woman be pregnant.
Let a handful of paddy be plenty.'

The Kondhs are an ancient community, who believe in the sacrifice of self for the welfare of the community. The Kondh hymns reveal that the priest was earnestly praying to the Earth Goddess and the Sun God for ample harvest, green jungle, and safety from dangers such as the attack of tigers and bites of snakes.

When some disaster occured in the Kondh village, it was believed to be because of the irresponsibility of the Kondh priest.

The priest is more accountable to the gods and goddess for the wellbeing of the community than his family. This practice is still prevalent in Kondh villages. Time has changed, but the ideology of the Kondhs in maintaining their religious philosophy has not changed. *Meriah* has stopped, but the philosophy of *Meriah* is symbolically represented now-a-days in which a human is substituted with a buffalo or a goat.

Human sacrifice was one of the most heinous acts practised by the Kondhs from time immemorial. It was only during the British rule that it was stopped. But the cultural loss was compensated for in the myths and epics. *Manduka Majhi* is such a narrative in which the maternal uncle did not hesitate to sacrifice his nephew to the goddess. Similarly, it was also found in the same epic that a person who tries to violate the social custom is liable for punishment. In *Manduka Majhi* epic, the nephew had violated the social customs by wishing to marry his uterine sister, which is not a normal practice. In Kondh society, the nephew has a special status.

Transformation from Human to Divine

Female priest, Gurumai, is found in the religious practice of the Kondhs. They are spirit-women married to the Gods and demi-gods. Bhima, the rain god is married to Kondhen – a real virgin, and after the spirit-woman is dead, she is also worshipped along with Bhima. The old spirit-women are known as Gurumai (literal meaning: *Guru*

– master and *mai* – mother); they are the depositories of the origin myths and other mythical narratives, which is a part of ritual performance. When somebody asks them to narrate the story of the gods and goddess, they deny saying, 'Who would like to awake the sleeping gods. If they are invoked, who will offer them sacrifice?'

The purpose and meaning of ritual performance is more important than the sung narrative. Unless a ritual performance is taking place, the Gurumai and the priests do not want to sing the religious songs. A priest, on being asked the reason for practising human sacrifice, replied, 'Are you my son?' It means, it is the son, brother's son, nephew, and cousin who are entitled to know the esoteric knowledge. No outsider is, therefore, allowed inside the ritual complex for observation and participation. Only their Raja or his nominee can take part in the ritual, provided he will offer liquor to the goddess and drink it.[9]

Bhima, the cultural and divine hero of the Kondhs is an ideal model of a hero who is a human being with supernatural powers. His divine powers and human weaknesses is a blend of qualities, which helps not only the individual but also the society at large. Bhima was the first cultivator in the forest, and invention of agricultural technology must have been the magic of that time when a person was able to cultivate paddy, level the land, get water to irrigate the land, and invent liquor and iron. This invention had certainly changed the life of the traditional Kondhs/Gonds/Bhunjia who in turn have worshipped the supernatural powers to help them in cultivation and getting ample harvest. Even among the Kondhs the craving for harvest was so important that they did not hesitate to sacrifice their eldest son/daughter to the Earth Mother Goddess with an understanding that the human body is to mingle in the earth to reappear in the form of nature.

Social events are also memorized as stories in the mental text of the singer. Respect for social figures is another area for creation of stories and epics. The social events, sometimes, become more important than the mythical event and in course of time the social heroes are deified. In Hatibandha village, a Brahmin boy was sacrificed to propitiate Goddess Duarsani. After that, the Brahmin boy became one of the Gods among the Kondh gods and goddesses. His spirit enters into a Kondh man during the *dasahara* festival and to honour him, a coconut is offered. The Brahmin god demands sacred thread (*upabita*), which is not given to him fearing that if he is given the thread, he would regain his Brahma power and damage the local gods.[10] This indicates the predomination of Kondh Gods over the Brahmins. The social realities are symbolized in the ritual performance and mythical beliefs. *Meriah* – the human sacrifice was substituted by a buffalo sacrifice.

Cultural Assimilation

The worship of Bhima found in the rites and rituals and in the mythology of Central Indian culture deserves a close study. Bhima is a popular rain god worshipped to get plenty of rain and a good harvest. He is worshipped in the form of a phallus stone-symbol along with the tutelary deity in each village. In order to tackle the

drought situation, the rain god Bhima is invoked through the shamanistic process and worshipped for seven days in the villages in a systematic manner. If the paddy cultivation is hopeless owing to lack of rain, people believe that only Bhima can bring water from Lord Indra. In the folk belief, Bhima is the nephew of Indra, the supreme rain god. As the social status of a nephew commands respect from the uncle, the people believe that Bhima can get water from his uncle Indra without any problem. So, in each and every village, Bhima is worshipped along with the goddess Mother Earth. To appease Bhima, they invite Kondhen who is possessed in a young girl of the village and the two are united ritually. It is a strong belief that by uniting Bhima-Kondhen the village will get good rains. It may be observed that in Brahmin – dominated villages, people perform *Rishyashringa Yajna* with pomp and ceremony to get rain during a drought. The trend of *Rishyashringa Varana* (invitation of sage Rishyashringa) is nothing but an imitation of the mythical tradition of the *Ramayana*. In the *Ramayana*, in order to get rid of a severe drought in his country, Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhya, had invited Rishyashringa to his kingdom by Jarata (the union of Prakiti and Purusha in the form of Rishyashringa Jarata, symbolizing creation by union).

The union of Bhima-Kondhen has close resemblance with the Ramayana tradition. western Orissa and Chhatishgarh are drought-prone areas. The non-Brahmin people of this locality try to appease the gods by worshipping them through the Vedic process as the Brahmins do. To solve the natural problem of drought, the people of this locality have imitated that part of the *Ramayana* where bringing about rain through a supernatural process ends a drought.

Influence of Hindu mythology in Kondh narrative is another area of acculturation.

The community adopts the suitable episode, which matches the community's immediate need. Therefore, some Vedic and tantric ritual practices are also followed among the Kondhs. The trees such as *Palasa* and *Udumbara*, used in the Vedic and Brahmin ritual is found among the Kondh ritual practice, which signifies the common beliefs of Vedic rituals and tribal religion. In *Chandi Purana*, Goddess Durga had to fight with three furious demons namely Tamra, Chikshura, and Mahisasura. Interestingly, these three demons are represented as buffaloes brought for a sacrifice. While purchasing the buffalo for sacrifice during the festival, the priests pick up those buffaloes, whose toes look like copper (*Tamra*), and the toe is called *Khura* (phonologically which resembles with Chikshura) and *Pod* means buffalo which is Mahishasura. Thus, the three demons Tamra, Chikshura and Mahishasura are symbolized in a copper-legged buffalo -*Tama-Khuria-Pod,* which is considered fit for sacrifice. While purchasing the buffalo the priests look for the above signs on the toes of the buffalo and purchase it.

Singer

The Oral Formula

The *Jani* and his singers pause and rest for five minutes as an interval. There is an interval when a major or a part of the plot is completed. Distribution of liquor takes place in

each interval. After offering two drops of liquor, the Gova Jani drinks liquor from a copper pipe and his accompanists drink from a leaf cup. This takes place repeatedly throughout the night till the performance of the puranas is over.

When the main singer sings a line, the assistants repeat the line 10-12 times. In the meantime, the main singer composes the next line in his mental text and thus the narrative line is maintained.

Epic Texture

The epic language is different from the spoken language. For instance, in the creation myth of the Kondhs, it is mentioned that 'some people became rice, and some people became goat and sheep'. This means that some Kondhs took up the occupation of paddy cultivation and produced rice. Some of them adopted goat herding and sheep rearing. The language is esoteric and when tried to understand from its cultural context, the meaning becomes clear.

The epic singer Gova Jani is a specialist in invoking the *Gova* song in a majestic manner with typical epic language. The verse is accompanied by music with a specific musical value and meter. The language of the epic is more literary than the ordinary language. The metaphors, similes, and symbols used in the epic reveals the very character of the poetic imagination and creative mind of the poet.

Kondhmeli Geet (Kondh Rebellion)

People of the Kondh community have settled predominantly in the Kalahandi region. The Kondhs constitute the major tribal community of the district. Locally, Kalahandi is known as Kandhan Desh. The Kondh were the landowners and village self-rule was found there. The Naga kings of Kalahandi had a close relation with the Kondhs. The story of Kondh association with the Naga kings runs from a proverb –

Pat bandha Budaka—The Kondh of Budaka clan ties the turban on the king.

Kudedhara Tuduka—The Tuduka Kondhs offer their lap to the king during coronation.

Jhi dia Sermelk—The Sermelka clan Kondh offers his daughter to the Naga kings in marriage.

The Kondh belonging to Budaka clan ties the turban on the prince of the Naga dynasty in Kalahandi during coronation. The story runs that when Sri Hari Chandra Deo (1173-1201 A.D.) was ruling over Kalahandi, the state was in unrest. His pregnant queen went to her father's house at Gadapur where she gave birth to Rama Chandra Deo (1201 – 1234). At that time, the Patmajhi of Tuduka clan took Rama Chandra Deo on his lap and completed the coronation ceremony. Therefore, the Budaka Kondh ties the turban and the Sermelka Kondhs gives his daughter in marriage to the Naga prince. The custom in Naga kingdom of Kalahandi was that, before marrying a princess the prince must marry a Kondh bride. That tradition continued till independence (Kuanr:

1980:53)[11]. This was the symbol of the Kondh—Naga association. The Kondhs were practising *Meriah* for better harvest and it was abolished during the reign of king Fateh Narain Deo (1831 – 1853). After Fate Narain Deo, his son Maharaja Udit Pratap Deo (1853 – 1882) became the king. During his rule, the Kondhs of Madanpur and Rampur started a revolution against the king.

Lt. Macknell arrested a Kondh leader Rendo Majhi. The charge against him was that he was practising *Meriah* and was helping Chakara Bisoi – a kondh leader of Ganjam – to fight the British for freedom. Rendo Majhi was sent to the jail in Rasulkonda (Kuanr: 1980:59). On 10 December 1855, Rendo Majhi was brought to Urladani village, his own area, with his hands and legs bound by iron chains. The intention of the British soldiers was to frighten the Kondhs of Rendo Majhi's village. But on seeing the torture of Rendo Majhi, the Kondhs felt insulted and they attacked the British soldiers with their bow, arrows, and axes. This rebellion was suppressed. Again Rendo Majhi was sent to jail and sentenced to death.

During this period, Udit Pratap wanted to develop his kingdom in education and agriculture. This was because Kalahandi was full of forestland with tribal Kondhs and the revenue from land was a meagre amount, insufficient to pay their taxes to the British. Also, for administration, educated people were highly essential.

The king brought the Kultas, a cultivator caste, from Sambalpur and the Brahmins from Puri and Ganjam. He allotted huge plain lands to the Kultas and the Brahmins. As the British had subdued the Kondh rebellion during 1853 – 1856, the Kondhs tolerated all that was meted out to them. They had to remain in the culture of silence. Thereafter, Raja Raghu Keshari Deo became king in 1882. There was yet another Kondh rebellion in 1882. As Raghu Keshari was very young, his mother Queen Asha Kumari (wife of Udit Pratap) ruled over Kalahandi. When Raja Udit Pratap had no son, he adopted Ramabhadra Sai as his foster son. But owing to his misconduct he was exiled in 1860 to Rampur. Ramabhadra Sai was hoping to attain the throne ever since Raja Udit Pratap adopted him but failed when Asha Kumari ruled Kalahandi. So he rebelled against the Kondhs and the 1882 Kondhmeli was initiated.

The Social Context of Kondh Rebellion

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Kalahandi was part of the Nagpur Presidency. When the kings were ruling over different estates, they handed over the administrative power to the village headmen. The village headmen were mostly tribal. A proverb runs *Gondar je Bhuin aru Rajar je Raja.* The literal meaning is that the land belongs to the Gonds and the administration to the king. The revenue was being collected through the village headman from the cultivators. The tax was in the form of paddy, crops, and labour. Free labour (*Bethi, Begar*) was compulsory for the common people. The number of cultivators was not very encouraging and the cultivable land was also not plenty. People were dependant on the jungle. Four months of the year were spent in cultivation while the remaining eight months in the collection of forest products.

During the British rule in 1883, Berry (Deputy Revenue Commissioner of the Central Provinces) stated the land revenue system. Before that there was no practice of currency. The man who was able to compete with others in providing revenue tax in the form of money was considered fortunate to be the village *Gauntia*. Hundreds of acres of land were distributed to the Kultas and the Brahmins and all of them were declared the *Gauntias*.

Owing to this practice, the traditional paddy-tax-payer-cultivators and *the gauntias* became poor. The freedom of the cultivators was curbed. The tribal chiefs could not collect money from the cultivators and lost their village headman status. The concept of all cultivators and the village headman as an economic unit to pay the tax to the king changed. The traditional tribals also lagged behind in adopting modern cultivation techniques, and in collection of revenue in comparison with the Brahmins and the Kultas. The kings, in order to save their state and to retain their administrative power, were tempted to shift the village administrative power from the tribals to the non-tribals. This was a bolt from the blue for the tribals. First they lost their contact with the royal power and the bond of traditional relationship was broken. Second, the tribal village headman and priests exercising power and religion on the village had to remain under the control of the new the *Gauntia*. The tribals felt deeply insulted by this.

Third, the Gonds and the Kondhs were honest and addicted to liquor. The later cultivators encouraged the tribals to take a loan and mortgage their land for a small amount. The honest tribals left their land, as they could not repay the debt owing to addiction.

It so happened that the tribals cleaned the forest, levelled the land and made it suitable for cultivation, and then the land was transferred to the cunning non-tribals. This is the history of the Kondhs of Kalahandi.

This was a great loss to their community's image and self-sufficient economy. The Kondhs became rebellious and united themselves.

They could have tolerated the socio-political dominance of others, but when they were deprived of their own Earth mother – *matimata* that was inherited from their ancestors, they became furious. Under these circumstances, the Kondh rebellion of Kalahandi took place. This was the fight between the indigenous people and the intruders. The rulers, the new landowners and the educated elite supported by the British Raj on the one hand, and the jungles' Kondhs on the other hand had a fight.

As seen in history, the Kondhs were defeated, and they fled into the jungle for their survival.

The Content

(The *Kondhmeli geet* (Kondh Rebellion Song) was composed by a poet Kampal Charan Bampal Suna. This manuscript was available with Maharaja Pratap Keshari Deo, Ex-Maharaja and Ex-Member of Parliament of Kalahandi; Jitamitra Parsed Singh Deo, Yubaraj (prince) of Khariar, and also the nephew of Sri P.K. Deo bought a copy of it. I have got the manuscript written down.)

Content

When the Naga king was ruling over Kalahandi, the Kondh headmen ruled the villages. Out of 1700 villages, about 1400 were dominated by the Kondhs. In 1876, when the total population of the Kalahandi estate was 1,21,000, the Kondh tribe alone numbered about 88,000. The small cultivators were paying *Mati kar*, land tax, to the *gauntias*, village administrative heads, and they were subsequently paying the tax to the king. The subjects were most obedient to the kings.

Till 1853, the Kondhs of Kalahandi knew nothing of paddy cultivation. King Udit Pratap invited some Kultas (a cultivator caste) from Sambalpur to introduce agricultural system in his state. In terms of land revenue, the land of the Kondhs was transferred to the Kultas. The Kondhs were unhappy with it. Des Jamindar (Desia Kondh *Gauntia* and Sardar) assembled in one place and to start Kondhmeli, they made a tradition of *Dalbula* to invite all the Kondh people. *Dalbula* is a tradition of inviting all the Kondhs to one place for a specific purpose. A red cloth tied to the branch of a *Rengal* tree and pasted with vermillion and sent to every village, on seeing which the Kondhs understand that they have to unite for the cause of their community. They come together with their traditional weapons. This *Dalbula* custom was prevalent from the 1850s when Chakara Bisoi had assembled the Kondhs against the British.

All the Kondhs assembled with their arrows, axes, spears, and musical instruments such as *Nishan* (one-sided drum), *Kama* (blowing instrument) and *Kahali* (wind instrument). The Desia Kondh *gauntia* Kamal Majhi of Balaspur village was the leader. They started plundering gold, silver, paddy, rice, goat, sheep etc. from the Kulta villages. In Narla area, where the Kultas were predominant, the Kondhs attacked all the Kulta villages.

This news reached the British administration at Raipur. Birbhadra Sai, the Samant of the M. Rampur Zamindary, helped the Kondhs.

The British commissioner from Raipur came to Narla and resolved the conflict between the Desia *gauntia* and the Kondhs. He promised the Kondhs that they would get their land back after an enquiry. He also requested the Kondhs to return the Kultas' property that they had plundered. The British went back to Raipur. After that, the Kultas got back their courage with the help of the British and the Raja of Kalahandi. They engaged the lower caste people against the Kondhs to collect the plundered property. The innocent Kondhs were also alleged of taking gold, silver etc. The Kultas demanded of the Kondhs double the amount of the plundered property. They also tortured the Kondhs mentally. This made the Kondhs rebellious. They again assembled by *Dalbula*-from Amathgarh to Asurgarh and killed *Iswar gauntia* of Mandel near Asurgarh. The Kondh leader Saranga Mallick came from Amathgarh. Thereafter, the British soldiers suppressed the rebellion at gunpoint. Seven Kondh leaders were sent to prison in the Andaman Nicobar islands which was called Kalapani.

The tribal rebellion during the nineteenth century in India was for freedom of land and autonomy of local power. The Kol rebellion of Singh Bhumi in 1832, Birsa

movement in 1895-1900, Santal rebellion in 1855-1886, Kondh rebellion in 1850-1856 in Kalahandi, and Surendra Sai's rebellion during 1850-1865 in western Orissa for land and freedom are some of the freedom movements initiated by the tribal people. (Tribal and Indian civilization, Sinha Surajit, Man in India 61, 2, Page 108-109, June 1981).

The Kondhs of Kalahandi had two phases of rebellion. Rendo Majhi of Urladani initiated one during 1853 – 1856 which was suppressed by the British. Another Kondh rebellion was during 1882 when the Kulta cultivators of Kalahandi snatched the land and village headman power from the Kondhs.

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[5] Interview with the priest by the author during October 1985.

[6] Satapathy, Surendra, (1989) *Jataka kahani* (Oriya) Vidya puri, Cuttack, *See* "Kumbha Jataka".

[7] Wilkins, W.J, (1986) *Hindu Mythology*, Rupa and Co. Kolkota: p-75.

[8] *Ibid:* p-77.

[9] During a buffalo sacrifice festival in Kopia village in 1991, I was allowed to participate in the ritual space with an approval from the local King. In fact, they know me as a non-tribal, but they permitted me after I told them the purpose of my visit. They allowed me to sit inside with the singers, and I worshipped the earth Goddess with liquor. Thereafter, the priest offered me some drops of liquor which I took as prasad. The photographer I took along with me tried to take photograph wearing his shoes. He was warned and was not allowed to take photo. Then I took the photographs.

[10] Personal interview with Sri Chitrasen Bhoi, the Kondh Headman of Hatibandha Village where Duarsani the goddess is worshipped and the Brahman Devta is worshipped in a stone image.

[11] Kuanr D.C., (Ed). (1980) *Orissa District Gazetteers*, Kalahandi.

7

Kamar Oral Epics

Kamar (Paharia) Epic

The Kamar tribe is found in western Kalahandi and in the eastern part of Raipur district of Chhatishgarh. They were the rulers of the Bindra Nawagarh region (presently Gariabandh tehsil of Raipur district). They were also the headmen of some of the villages in Khariar state—presently identified in the Nuapada district of Orissa.

According to the 1911 census, the population of the Kamars was approximately 7,000 and in 1981 it was 19,750 in Chhatishgarh (Srivastava 1990:117)[1] and approximately 5,000 in Orissa. In Chhatishgarh, they are considered as a Scheduled Tribe and get certain privileges from the government. In Orissa, they are not considered as Scheduled Tribes. The enumerators of the Census have incorrectly identified them as Kamar, another caste among the iron melters – blacksmith, and have removed them from the list of Scheduled Tribes.

The Kamars have their ecological concentration in the Katpar-Purubadi hill range. They practise shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing, and food gathering from the forest. When there is a lack of food or animals for hunting, they migrate from one place to another for a certain period of time and then return to their homeland. They do not allow any outsiders to hunt in their own jungles.

The Kamars speak their own language which is influenced by Halvi and Chhatishgarh. They believe in the gods and goddesses of the Gonds. Most of their rituals, customs, and religious beliefs are similar to that of the Gonds (Hiralal and Russell 1916:324).[2]

The folklore of the Kamars is rich in its ethnic content. Although they are small in number, their folklore, rites, and rituals reflect their distinct ethnic identity and ethnic symbols.

The Gonds and the Kondhs are the dominant groups in Kalahandi that exercise control over land ownership, village administration, and religious hierarchy. They have assimilated components of caste Hindu culture. But the Kamars are an isolated group maintaining their group identity.

The Kamars are divided into two sects: Budharajia and Mankadia. The Mankadia are monkey-eaters so the Budharajia look down upon them. They form their associational

clusters through their settlement or small village in isolation. It is seen that the Kamars do not settle with other castes/tribes, but they form their own caste/clan-based village.

The Kamar folklore is enriched with myths, legends, epics, tales, riddles, and songs. Their oral narratives, both in the form of prose and poetry, form a rich depository of their ethnic cultural traditions. They sing the long narrative epics and myths for nights together. All these narratives are rich with ethnic characteristics (Dube: 1947:7).[3] The oral narratives of the Kamar tribes are known as *geet*, *khena*, and *katha*. *Geet* means song, it may be as short as two lines or as long as a thousand-lined epic. They sing the oral epics, which are also known as *Geet*.

The oral tradition of the Kamar (Paharia) is rich with its primitive cultural resources. Their narratives portray their knowledge of the forest and their struggles for survival against animals and nature. Their oral tradition is divided into three major categories.

1. Creation myths and eulogies of gods and goddesses.
2. Oral epics and prose narratives.
3. Songs of entertainment.

The creation myths and oral epics are esoteric in nature. Their folklore is also not shared with others because of their language; the Kamars can understand the language of the plain dwellers, but their language is unintelligible to others. Despite their folklore being esoteric,others have influenced.

Creation Myth of the Kamars

In the beginning, God created a man and a woman in whose old age two children of opposite sex were born. Mahadeo, however, caused a massive deluge over the world to destroy a jackal, who had offended him.

One day, the old Kamar went hunting. While shooting an arrow at a deer, the deer said, 'dear hunter, it will rain for seven days and there will be a great flood'. The Kamar was greatly surprised to hear a deer talking. So the Kamar returned to his house and told this to his wife. They kept their children in a bamboo box, *Jhapi*, and provided them with food for 12 years. When the deluge struck, everything went under water except the bamboo box. A generation passed.

Mahadeo wanted to create man on the earth. So he made a crow out of the dirt of his body and sent it in search of a man in the deluge. The bird discovered the bamboo *jhapi* and the humans within it and brought them to Mahadeo.

Mahadeo asked, 'Who are you?' The boy and the girl said, 'We are brother and sister.' So Mahadeo separated them for 12 years, and disfigured their faces with small-pox marks. They could not recognize each other and were later married. The Kamars are the children of this couple.

Kamar Widow and Lakshmi

This is an epic sung by the Kamar tribes of Sunabeda region of Kalahandi. The name of the epic is *Maa randi po tura*, which literally means 'the story of a widowed mother and her orphaned son'. The gist of the narration is summarized as follows.

There was a poor widow in a village who lived with her son. She served as a daily labourer in the house of the village headman *(Gauntia)* who belonged to the Gond tribe. The widow husked paddy, guarded agricultural fields, and helped in household chores. Her earnings were so inadequate that she was unable to make ends meet. She found it very difficult to manage her basic sustenance. Very often the old woman dug out roots from the nearby jungle and eked out a living.

One day, she did not have any food to eat. She sighed and said 'Oh mother Lakshmi! For how long are you going to put me through such difficulties?' On hearing the painful utterance of the poor woman, Mother Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, appeared before her in the form of a young Kamar girl. On being asked by the widow, Goddess Lakshmi replied that she was an orphan and had come for shelter. The old woman took pity on her and gave her shelter. The widow's son regarded the Kamar girl (Lakshmi) as his sister.

The widow gave Lakshmi a handful of rice to cook food. It was cooked and surprisingly it was more than enough for the three of them. Since then, they had no problem for food and the three lived happily.

One day, Lakshmi advised the widow's son to clear the jungle and prepare a field for cultivation. The boy prepared a field and borrowed bullocks and a plough from the Gond headman. But he was unable to collect seeds. Lakshmi took some straw in her hand, made it into small pieces and advised the boy to sow them. The Kamar boy did so. The villagers laughed at him and thought that he had gone mad.

But surprisingly, there was such a rich harvest that it was quite difficult for the boy to bring the entire produce home. Lakshmi told the old woman to go to the village headman and get six *Kodi* of carts to bring the paddy from the field and to pay him the charges for transport. On being asked about the charges, the village headman (*Gauntia*) thought that it was only yesterday that she was working in his house as a maid earning daily wages and now she was in need of six *kodi* of carts to transport her harvest!

However, he agreed to provide the carts on being assured by the widow to be paid the agreeable fare. The *Gauntia* reluctantly provided her with six *Kodi* carts. The paddy was transported from the field to the widow's house. But there was no place in her small hut to store the entire harvest and so it was kept outside her hut.

The *Gauntia's* cartman demanded the transport fare. Lakshmi immediately plucked a pumpkin from the roof of her hut and gave it to the cartman to hand over to the *Gauntia*. They came with the pumpkin.

When the *Gauntia* saw the pumpkin, he put his hands on his forehead and said, 'See how wicked that Kamar widow is! She cheated me with a mere pumpkin for six *kodi*

carts'. He gave the pumpkin to his wife to prepare curry. While cutting the pumpkin, the *Gauntia*'s wife found a large number of gold coins inside it. The *Gauntia* came to know of this from his wife and asked his cartman, 'How many more pumpkins did you see on the widow's roof?' The cartman said that he had seen innumerable pumpkins. The *Gauntia* was spellbound. He had thought that there was no man as rich as himself in his locality. Perhaps, now goddess Lakshmi had taken shelter at the old woman's house.

Then the Gauntia came up with a game plan. He wanted to give his daughter in marriage to the son of the old widow so that, through his daughter he could get control over the old woman's property.

He offered this proposal to the old widow. She gladly agreed and the marriage of the Kamar widow's son with the only daughter of the headman was solemnized.

Next, the headman wanted Lakshmi—the adopted daughter of the Kamar widow—as his daughter-in-law. He said to the old woman, 'O *Samdhin!* I gave my daughter in marriage to your son. Now I want my son to be married to your daughter.' The old woman unwittingly agreed to this proposal. The marriage was almost fixed. Goddess Lakshmi saw through the headman's plan. She said to the old woman, 'Mother, do you think I am a human being? I took pity on you. You called me and hearing your pitiable condition I came to you. I helped you in all respects. Now how can you think of my marriage with a human being? You believed the *Gauntia* who was not even giving you your rightful wages. I considered you as my own mother. I filled your house with plenty. Now I am going.' Saying this, Goddess Lakshmi disappeared.

When the *Gauntia* heard this, he felt that the Kamar widow had cheated him.

Gandhu *Paradhia*

This narrative is named after the hero Gandhu *Paradhia*. Gandhu is the name of the hero and *paradhia* means hunter. The gist of the epic is provided below.

Gandhu *Paradhia* was a hunter. He killed a deer and at that instant the Gond prince of Bindra Nawagarh kingdom and his subjects arrived at the spot and laid claim to the dead deer. There was a fight between them and the prince of Bindra Nawagarh took away the deer skin. Gandhu tried to take revenge for this defeat. He made a beautiful handicraft piece out of bamboo and presented it to the king of Subarnapur. The king gladly accepted the gift and inturn gave him some gold coins and expressed his inability to help him in his objectives. Gandhu returned with the gold coins.

Then, he went to the king of Manikgarh who was a Bhunjia king. He presented the gold coins to the king and sought his help to fight the king of Bindra Nawagarh. The plea was that the prince of Bindra Nawagarh had forcibly taken away the deer skin from the Bhunjia territory. The king of Manikgarh expressed his inability to help him in his expedition and gave him some *Manikya*. Then Gandhu went to the Binjhal king of Padampur. The king employed Kokobhaini, a tribal warrior-hero with superhuman abilities to help Gandhu fight the prince of Bindra Nawagarh. A great battle was fought between Kokobhaini and the prince of Bindra Nawagarh and the prince was

defeated. Gandhu demanded the return of the deer skin that was forcibly taken by Kokobhaini. But Kokobhaini refused. So another combat took place between Gandhu and Kokobhaini. Ultimately Kokobhaini defeated Gandhu. Gandhu, out of grief, went into the jungle. He never went to Padampur region since. Till today, the Kamars have no kingdom.

Kachhra Dhurua: A Kamar Hero

Legend runs that there was a Kamar ruler in Bindra Nawagarh. He killed the Bhimraj bird (Racket tailed Drongo) that belonged to a foreigner from Delhi. The foreigner sent man-eating soldiers who ate up all the Kamars except a pregnant woman. She took shelter in a Brahmin's house in Patna and gave birth to a child whose name was Kachhra Dhurua. Kachhra Dhurua grew up to be a benevolent warrior and took revenge against the man-eating soldiers and regained his ancestral throne of Bindra Nawagarh (Russel and Hiralal 1916 : 324)

The mythical epic *Linga Bharat*, *Baddevtar Khena*, and *Makar Khena* songs are available among the Kamars.

Interpretation

In the oral narratives presented above, we find two distinct aspects: the ethnic culture of the Kamars, thus preserving their group identity and, the cultural diffusion and assimilation into the larger traditions of India.

The culture of the Kamars to retain their group identity is based on some facts, which can be found in their socio-cultural processes. The questions to deduce the facts are

a. Why do Kamars prefer to retain their group identity? and

b. Why do they like to live in isolation?

These questions may be examined from the perspective of their folk narratives. The Gonds constituted one of the powerful tribes that overthrew the Kamars from Bindra Nawagarh state which was originally the ancestral seat of the Kamars. The ethnographic account by Russell and Hiralal also mentions that the Kamars were an offshoot of the Gonds (Russel and Hiralal 1916:324). But the Kamar myth mentions that they are the direct descendants of their supreme god Mahadeo. In this myth, they claim that their first progenitors were a Kamar couple: a pair of children sharing parentage. Thus, the myth shows their racial purity, which rejects the concept of their being an offshoot of the Gonds. When the Gonds occupied their territory, the hostility between the Gonds and the Kamars might have intensified. So, to project their separate identities and to alienate the Kamars from the Gonds, such myths could have been created.

It is found that the Kamars were the first discoverers of goddess Duarsani, now the tutelary deity of the Gonds and the other tribes. The Kamar priest who was replaced by a Gond priest worshipped goddess Duarsani. This story validates the dominance of the Gonds over the Kamars through the processes of gaining control over the state,

transferring of the power base, and religious priesthood. It is found in western Kalahandi that the Gonds were the administrative heads, *Gauntia* and *Makaddam*. They were also the religious heads, thus achieving a priestly status. This symbolizes the transfer of political power from the Kamars to the Gonds. So the truth of lordship over a peasant society - the Gonds over the primitive Kamar tribe - is established through a power shift. It was a great loss to the Kamars. The loss of land and goddess has continued to be black spots in their race's memory, which could have been projected in their folklore. In the narrative of Gandhu *Paradhia*, ownership of the deer skin symbolizes the intervention of the Gonds into the territory of the Kamars. More specifically, it validates the above fact of the conquering of the Kamars. Even to compensate for the deterioration of their socio-political status they have projected themselves as superior to the Gonds. It is also evident from their folk narratives *Maa randi po tura* or 'The Kamar widow and Lakshmi'.

Ethnocentric Kamars

In reality, it is unimaginable for a Kamar boy to marry a Gond *Gauntia* girl. But it happened so in the Kamar widow epic. The Kamar boy married the *Gauntia*'s daughter but the Gond's son could not marry the Kamar widow's daughter.

This again indicates an ethnocentrism among the Kamar community. The Kamars are considered an offshoot of the Gonds. In the narrative, the Kamars have conceived a marriage between a Gond girl and a Kamar boy. In this narrative, the concept of ethnic purity of the Kamars is exhibited by the refusal of marriage of a Gond boy with Lakshmi. A Gond girl given in marriage to a Kamar boy reflects a superior caste status of the Kamars. Till today there is no evidence of a Kamar girl being divorced by a Kamar boy or any Kamar girl eloping with a non-Kamar boy. This suggests the maintenance of ethnic purity among the Kamars by endogamous marriages.

In the creation myth of the Kamars, Mahadeo, the supreme god wanted to bring about a deluge on the earth simply to drown the jackal which offended him. Again, in the epic Gandhu *Paradhia*, Gandhu fought for a deer skin which reveals the impulsive character of the Kamars who are more likely to be guided by their race's memory and social conservatism than intellect or reasoning.

In the Gandhu *Paradhia* epic, we see that the tribal warrior Kokobhaini, who defeated the Gond King of Bindra Nawagarh on behalf of Gandhu and got back the deer skin, betrayed Gandhu *Paradhia*. It symbolizes the introduction of another tribe's power in his territory. Out of anguish and diffidence, he ran into the jungle as a mark of withdrawal. A sense of insecurity along with a challenge to his self-esteem and self-identity took over his mental process. He started a new settlement, where he did not expect to face any outside intervention. Till today, it has been observed that the Kamars do not allow people from other castes/tribes into their exclusive settlements. They always build their habitat only at the foot of some hill adjacent to a jungle and prefer living in isolation. Even their language, customs, traditions, and rituals are entirely different from those of other communities.

The Gonds are peasants. They share the agro-economic activities with other non-tribal groups and thus have been assimilated into the Greater Indian tradition. As plain-dwellers and agriculturists, they have adopted the changes through their participation in spheres such as education, politics, and culture. But the Kamars have defined a particular territory for food gathering and as their dominant form of economic activity. They are not even aware that their exclusive habitat in the forest is being encroached into and gradually being destroyed by outsiders, thereby depriving them of their forest-dependant livelihood. They try to maintain their group solidarity and isolated style of living by not coming to the plains.

Esoteric Elements in Kamar Folklore

No other ethnic group knows about the esoteric elements inherent in Kamar folklore. The ethnocentric character of the Kamars, the ethnic stereotype of Kamars in relation to the Gonds, and their indifferent attitude towards other communities is not visible in the present Kamar lifestyle. But when their oral tradition is carefully studied and analysed, the esoteric components can be seen. Similarly, their folklore has given them a sense of unity and integrity in their ingroup building and ethnic mobility.

Co-existing ethnic groups project a composite culture; they do not completely give up their ethnicity and cultural moorings. There are certain reasons and compulsions for maintaining their ethnic identity. The economically dominant groups have the ideological predominance over the minor ethnic groups living with them. In such cases, the art and ideologies of the dominant group influences the culture of the ethnic minority as a result of which they completely assimilate into the dominant culture. In some cases, they feel insecure that their group identity is under threat. So, they try to maintain their ethnic identity by retaining the cultural traits of the group. This is true in the case of the Kamars in relation to the Gonds.

Cultural Diffusion

In the oral narratives of the Kamars, we may see certain motifs which depict the age-old cultural interaction between the tribal and the non-tribal groups of Central India. The following motifs are found in the Kamar narratives.

Creation Myth:

1. Mahadeo - Siva as the Supreme God.
2. A talking deer warns of a deluge on the earth.
3. Concept of deluge and creation of the earth, bird, and animal by Mahadeo.
4. Floating of a box in the deluge and the first brother-sister in the box.
5. Brother-sister incest.
6. Creation of man from the union of the brother and sister.

KachbraDhurua: A Kamar Hero

1. A pregnant Kamar woman taking shelter in a Brahmin's house in Patna.
2. The Kamar hero taking revenge on his father's enemy and regaining his father's kingdom.

The Kamar Widow and Lakshmi

Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth appeared as a Kamar girl in a Kamar widow's house. The concept of Lakshmi as the goddess of wealth is a later inclusion. However, in the *Baddevtar Khena*, the Kamar recites the names many sages and Hindu gods and goddesses such as Durga, Siva, and Kali Kankalin, and Bana Khandi Rishi among others. The motifs of the creation myth found in the Kamar creation myth have a striking resemblance with the Hindu mythology *Srimad Bhagavata*.

On studying the tribal myths of Central India, Blackburn is of the opinion that these myths are by no means free from Sanskritic influence (Blackburn 1977:200).[4] The motif of the talking deer in the Kamar myth is influenced by the Hindu mythology *Srimad Bhagavata*. In this text, a small talking fish warned King Satyabrata of the future deluge on the earth. The king was identified later as Manu (*Srimad Bhagavata*, VIII Skandha: 24 Adhaya).[5] In the context of tribal myth, it is a jungle deer: the Kamar had witnessed a talking deer. This shows the cultural diffusion of Hindu mythology in a tribal setting in Central India.

The narrative of a Kamar hero, Kachhra Dhurua, is also influenced by the Chauhan origin myth. A pregnant Kamar woman taking shelter in a Brahmin's house in Patna resembles the origin myth of the Chauhans of western Orissa (Ramsey 1901:81-303).[6] Similar myths are also found among other tribal communities of Central India (Mishra 1993:20).[7]

It shows that an indigenous community confined to a particular geographical region has similarities in their mythological beliefs and concepts with those of the Greater Sanskritic tradition of India.

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Chapter 8

Bhunjia Oral Epics

Introduction

The Gurumai, female priestess of the Bhunjia tribe, sings the *Bhima Sidi* and the origin myth of Goddess Sunadi for hours together at the worship place.

There lived 12 brothers of Lodha. They had only one sister named Dushila. The brothers earned their livelihood by hunting forest animals. The sister was looking after the household chores. When the brothers returned from the forest with their hunt, Dushila cooked the meat for them.

One day the 12 brothers told Dushila, 'Dear sister, we have many rooms in our house. You are allowed to open any of the rooms except one. In no situation will you open this restricted room.'

Saying this they went to the jungle.

They came back in the evening with the hunt. The next day, before going to the jungle they reminded Dushila not to open the restricted room. This continued; every day, before they left for the jungle, they would remind and prohibit their sister from opening the room. The 12 brothers had preserved the dried meat of different animals in different rooms. The room they prohibited their sister from entering was used to preserve dried boar-meat. The brothers thought that if their sister took the boar-meat and burnt it in the hearth, then the fire would be put out owing to the melting of the fat in the meat and once the fire was extinguished it would be very difficult to set fire to the hearth again.

Once, the brothers went for hunting and when Dushila was alone, she thought of opening the restricted room. She opened the room out of curiosity and found the dried boar-meat. She brought some meat and burnt it in the fire of the hearth. The fat in the meat melted and the fire went out. In those days, fire was not available readily. So once a fire was set, it was kept burning using big wooden logs, and it was called 'eternal fire'.

When the fire was extinguished, Dushila thought, 'What shall I do? Where shall I go to get fire?'

She climbed up a tree and found a fire. She noticed some smoke in the sky on the other side of the hill. She went to that hill to collect fire. She reached somewhere close to the place and saw a Brahman sitting in *tapasya* (penance).

Barabhai Lodha (12 brothers) returned home and found that their sister was missing. They also found the restricted room—where the boar-meat was preserved—open, the meat missing, and the fire no more burning in the hearth.

They understood that Dushila had burnt the meat in the fire and thus the fire had been put out. They also presumed that she must have gone to fetch fire. The brothers waited but Dushila did not return. They waited for two days but their sister did not come back.

The brothers sat together and decided to search for Dushila. They were aware that except themselves, no other person stayed in that forest. They started on the other side of the hill to search for their sister.

They found a Brahman sitting in penance in front of a cave and the mouth of the cave covered with a huge stone. The brothers asked the Brahmin about their sister. But the Brahmin replied, 'I have not seen anybody. I am in *tapasya*.' The brothers then moved the stone at the mouth of the cave and found stone pillars inside. The brothers broke the pillars down and entered into the cave. They found their sister Dushila sitting there. Seeing the brothers, she burst into tears and narrated the whole story to them. She told them how she had come there to fetch fire, reached the Brahman, and how the Brahman imprisoned her in the cave. The brothers were enraged. They caught hold of the Brahman and killed him. They cut the flesh of the Brahman with their arrows and hung his skeleton on the tree. Because the Brahman was practising penance in the *giri* (hill), the hill is named after him as *Giri Brahman*.

The 12 brothers came back home with their sister. While Dushila was in the cave with the Brahmin, she was made pregnant by him. She gave birth to twin children – a boy and a girl – whom she named Budharaja and Sunadi. The 12 brothers Lodha took care of Budharaja and Sunadi. The later generations worshipped these two as deities and observed festivals for them.

Origin Myth of Sunadi

Budhadeo lived in Budharaja hill. Sunadi, his sister, lived with him. One day, Sunadi went to see *Khalari Yatra* – festival of Khalaridevi. Budhadeo was unaware of it. At the festival, Sunadi met Kamar Deo and fell in love with him. They enjoyed their life and in course of time Sunadi became pregnant. She gave birth to a boy and they lived with Kamar Deo.

Khalaridevi, the goddess, said 'Sunadi! You came to my region, stayed with me, and blamed me for your act. Leave my region and go back to your region.' Sunadi was helpless. She took her son and left. On her way back, the child felt hungry. She fed him with breast milk in Patora region. Kamar Deo knew that Sunadi Devi had left Khalari region.

Sunadi left Patora and then came to Sunabeda. Budharaja, her brother, saw her with a child. He knew everything and said, 'Sunadi, you have shamed me. Don't show your sinful face to me. This black act is a blemish on my face. But I will accept you under

one condition. If you can yield gold from this field, then I will forget the past, consider you as my sister and accept you as sacred, else I will not accept you.'

Sunadi left her child there, dressed in a white *saree* (cloth), entered the nether region and started practising penance.

Budharaja saw Sunadi's son sitting on a stone. He thought, for the mistake committed by Sunadi, her son cannot be punished. So he took his *Bhanja* (sister's son) to his house. He had a daughter named Kondhen. Sunadi's son was called Bhimsen. Bhimsen grew up in his uncle's house. Kondhen grew up to be a beautiful girl. Budhadeo said to his wife, 'We have only one daughter. From where shall we get a bridegroom? So let us accept our own nephew as our son-in-law'. Both of them decided to accept Bhimsen as their son-in-law. Bhimsen was helping his uncle Budharaja in all the work.

One day Budharaja told Bhimsen, 'Dear *Bhanja*, we don't have water in our hill. People are in trouble because of water scarcity. So please dig a pond.' When Bhimasen was engaged in digging the pond on the hilltop, Kondhen used to take food for him. But Kondhen was not fascinated by Bhimsen. In order to make her laugh, Bhima, being naked, danced like a mad man. Every day they both had fun.

One day, Kondhen was ill and her mother took food for Bhima. She had worn her daughter's clothes that day. While bringing the food, Bhima saw her and thought her to be his beloved Kondhen. As usual, he threw off his clothes and being naked, started dancing. But when he saw that her mother had come instead of Kondhen, he was ashamed and left the jungle. The digging of the pond was left unfinished owing to his departure. (The unfinished pond is still found on Budharaja hill.)

Bhima settled down on another hill. He wanted to cultivate the land. He prepared a *Kopar* to level the land. Kondhen was staying with her father Budharaja. One day, a demon saw Kondhen and wanted to seduce her. He abducted Kondhen and ran away.

Meanwhile, Bhimsen was levelling the field. All of a sudden, his *kopar* broke into two. Bhimsen thought, 'I had made such a strong *Kopar*. How did it break?' He guessed that there must have been some problem in his uncle's house. Leaving behind his task, he came to Budharaja hill. He saw his uncle (who was also his father-in-law) and his aunt crying. Budha Deo told Bhimsen about Kondhen's abduction by the demon. Bhimsen immediately started a search for his wife Kondhen. He searched for her in Runjhda hill, Totidua hill, Kandeldol hill, Halka paghar hill and many other hills, but in vain. Finally, he went to Ranimuhas hill. The demon had hidden Kondhen there. In that hill, there was a narrow *sudanga* where the demon was hiding. Bhima burnt some wild grass and let the smoke inside the cave. Owing to the heavy smoke, the demon could not breathe and he came out. Bhimsen then killed him. Then Bhimsen started searching for Kondhen and found her near a waterfall.

There was a huge stone with a hole near that fall. Bhima took Kondhen to that stone and to examine her chastity said, 'If you will enter into the hole of that huge stone seven times, I will believe that you are chaste'. Kondhen entered into the hole

seven times and came out successfully. Bhima thus knew that Kondhen was chaste and accepted her. Bhimsen returned to Budharaja with Kondhen. Budharaja celebrated the marriage of Bhimsen and Kondhen. Bhima stayed in the house of Budharaja as bride-service.

Budharaja gave Bhimsen 12 chunks of cultivable land: Sunabeda, Kutrabeda, Gatibeda, Saharasbeda, Ghusribeda, Mangurbeda, Changurbeda, Kodobeda, Villabeda, Kelbeda, Dohelbeda, and Kordibeda and ordered him to cultivate the land.

Bhima went to the fields for cultivation everyday. Sunadi Devi was under the surface of the earth in penance. While ploughing the field, the shaft of the plough hit Sunadi's head. Bhimsen found blood in the shaft of the plough. He discovered Goddess Sunadi carved into a stone. Bhima begged forgiveness from Sunadi. She wanted a temple where she could be worshipped. Bhima went to Sanghumar and Badghumar, and then to Thunipati hill and planned to build a temple for Sunadi. Sunadi told Bhima that a temple was not required, but the stone (*linga*) discovered in the field (in Jamla village) should be installed by planting a banyan tree. Sunadi wanted to stay in that tree. Bhima planted a Banyan tree and Goddess Sunadi is worshipped there even today.

Seven Brothers of Choktia Bhunjia and Worship of Goddess Sunadi

An old man was staying in Tarei par. He was ignorant of the existence of Sunadi. Sunadi wondered why nobody worshipped her. She wanted to be worshipped by some priest; so she thought of a plan. She took the form of a Sambar and went to Dhamdagarh. The seven Gond brothers were living in Dhamdagarh. The Sambar destroyed the Gonds' paddy fields. The next day, the Gonds found that somebody was destroying their paddy fields. This continued for some time. Then the seven brothers sat together and decided that they would kill whoever was destroying their paddy fields. They built a *mancha* – platform in the tree and watched for the animal. They saw that a Sambar was eating the paddy. So they chased the animal. They all had decided that they would return home only after killing the animal. But the animal was an illusion as goddess Sunadi was under the guise of the Sambar deer. So how could the Gonds kill it? The Sambar took the Gond brothers to a far-off region. They followed the Sambar for months together, but could not kill it. Finally, the Sambar was killed in Sagdaghat - a place to the South of Sunabeda.

The seven brothers kept their bows and arrows in the hollow of a banyan tree (called *dhanudera*). They skinned the Sambar and cut its meat. The elder brother suggested that they share the meat and dry it in the sun. When the meat was dry, it would not be heavy. After two days when the meat was dry, they would go back to their place Dhamdagarh. After two days they divided the dry meat into seven among the seven of them, but surprisingly the meat was divided into nine shares. Each one counted the share and found nine shares. They thought, 'somebody must be there, else why would two more shares keep coming up'. They called out loudly. The Gudagadia Dhurua heard the call and came to them and took his share.

The Dhurua asked them, 'who are you? Why did you call me and why do you give me the meat?'

The brothers said, 'You are from another region (territory).'

The Dhurua said, 'What would you eat? Please come home. I will give you utensils and rice. You can cook food and eat'

The seven brothers decided that as they did not know anyone to help them in that region, they would accept the invitation and stay in the Dhurua's house. The Dhurua had seven daughters and a son. The elder brother saw the seven girls while he was cooking.

In the morning when the elder brother went to the Dhurua to return the utensils, he asked him, 'Who are these girls? Are they your daughters or daughters-in-law?'

The Dhurua said, 'they are my daughters.'

The seven brothers, taking their shares of meat, went to Dhamdagarh. When the seven brothers were near Jamla village (the place of origin of Sunadi) the goddess Sunadi entered into the body of the younger brother. She possessed him and said, 'I am Sunadi. I had been to you in the form of a Sambar deer and brought you into my territory. You have taken my meat. You all will now settle here. The Dhurua has seven daughters and you shall marry them.'

On hearing this, the seven brothers went to Dhuruabudha and proposed marriage to his daughters. He agreed and the marriage was held. Then the seven brothers worshipped Sunadi. But the Goddess had entered into the body of the youngest brother. She said to the elder brothers:

'You know nothing about how to worship me.
You build a *lal bangla* – a small kitchen-hut in front of your house.
Do not allow any outsider to touch this kitchen.
You cook food in *Lal bangla* - kitchen,
But do not take food there.
All the married and unmarried girls are forbidden,
from putting on underwear and blouse.
Married women should wear white *saree*,
The women should not take double-boiled rice,
No man or woman should use cot,
All will sleep on the ground,
I am distributing the work among the seven brothers.
The Dhuruabudha of Tareipar will hold up the *Chhatra* ,
So he will be known as Chhatria.
Badmajhi – the elder brother will hold the *Karri* and offer sacrifice,
So he will be known as Karria.
The second brother will worship the *Kokaaduma* ,
He will be known as Jhankar.

The third brother will act as a *pujari*,
I will possess him.
The fourth brother will prepare the rice powder and prepare the cake and all other formalities during the worship,
So he will be known as Bhoi.
The fifth brother will carry my *Jhapi*,
He will be known as Barik.
The sixth brother will carry the *pal*,
He will be known as Dhurua.
The seventh brother will carry the *chandua* ,
He will be known as Chandua.'

Since then, the seven brothers had settled down in Sunabeda. They all stayed in a *chok*, and so they were called Choktia Bhunjia.

The Bhunjia believe that they are an offshoot of the Gonds. The Gonds also believe that the Bhunjia are their ancestors. The descendants of the seven brothers are now distributed over seven villages: Sunabeda, Koked, Soseng, Gadbhata, Sallepada, Kutrabeda, and Gatibeda.

Mandhar Majhi: A Tribal King of Sunabeda

The sons of the seven brothers had settled down in Sunabeda and were worshipping Goddess Sunadi with austerity. After being insulted by Budhadeo (her brother), Sunadi went to the nether regions and performed penance. After she completed her penance, Sunadi began cultivating gold in Sunabeda. When Budharaja, Sunadi's brother, saw that she was cultivating *suna* from the field, he blessed his sister and lifted her curse.

During that period, the Raja of Patna was ruling over the Sunabeda region. He knew that Sunadi was procuring yields of gold in the Sunabeda valley. He came to Sunabeda to collect taxes. He called the village chiefs and demanded tax. The Raja declared Mandhar Majhi, the eldest son of the elder brother of the seven brothers, as the chief of Sunabeda region.

From then on, Mandhar Majhi collected taxes from the subjects every month. He regularly presented the Raja with gold, silver, paddy, honey, *mahua* and many other things of the jungle. People called Mandhar as the *Gauntia* (Village headman) of Sunabeda; some also called him Mandhar Raja.

In a particular year, the people did not worship goddess Sunadi, and so there was no rain; there was a severe drought. The goddess was angry and that year, the gold yield was not encouraging. So, nobody paid their taxes. Mandhar Majhi went to the Raja of Patna and said,

> 'Oh Raja, this year goddess Sunadi is angry. There is no gold yield. So the people have not paid their taxes. Give me a suggestion as to how the goddess can be appeased so that she can grant us ample gold harvest.'

The Raja of Patna replied, 'Dear Mandhar Majhi, Sunadi is angry with you. Go and bring 12 *toka* (young boy), 12 *toki* (young girls), forest birds with grey feathers, and the powder of *char*- berry. I will worship Sunadi and you will get ample harvest.'

Mandhar Majhi interpreted the Raja's orders in a different way. In Bhunjia language, *toka* and *toki* means 'basket made of bamboos' (*toka* means big bamboo basket and *toki* means small bamboo basket). So Mandhar Majhi brought 12 big baskets and 12 small baskets and put *char* berry powder in it and tucked the grey feathers of the birds in the basket. Mandhar Majhi went to the Raja of Patna with his followers and presented the baskets in his court.

The Raja was astonished to see these things and said, 'Majhi, I wanted 12 young boys and 12 young girls to sacrifice at the altar of Goddess Sunadi and appease her. But you have come with all these. You will be put in jail for this.' Mandhar Majhi could not understand the mystery and was put in jail.

When the Majhis of Sunabeda saw that Mandhar did not return for many days, they knew he had been jailed. So the Kokdia Majhi, the Jhankar and the Mallick of Barkot went to Patna to meet the Raja. The Mallick of Barkot was a tantric (having magical powers). They reached Patna and decided that the Raja would not listen to them unless he realized Mandhar Majhi's powers. So the Mallick of Barkot created a hundred tigers with his tantric powers and let them loose in Patna city. People were scared by the tigers. The tigers chased the people of Patna away, except the three people from Sunabeda. The Raja came to know this and he invited the three people from Sunabeda. But these three people did not go to the Raja. Then the Raja went to them and asked them to drive the tigers away. The three people put forth a condition that if Mandhar Majhi of Sunabeda was released from jail, then the tigers would be driven away.

The Raja released Mandhar Majhi. The Kokdia Majhi saw that Mandhar was very weak and unable to walk. They requested for an elephant to take Mandhar to Sunabeda. The king sanctioned it and Mandhar Majhi returned on an elephant. It was with Barkotia Mallick's efforts that Mandhar was released, so the Gonds of Sunabeda kept him with them. Since then, Barkotia Mallick (a Bhunjia) has had the status of a priest to Sunadi. He had the authority to hold the clothes of the goddess.

The elephant brought from Patna was neglected as the people of Sunabeda had no idea about rearing an elephant, because their jungles had no elephants. After some time, the elephant became mad and started killing men and destroying the harvest. So the Bariks of Sunabeda were ordered to catch the elephant, but they could not; they left Sunabeda and ran away out of fear. An invalid, Thutna Barik, a leper as he was, was left behind in Sunabeda. They took him as a sacrifice to the altar of Sunadi but surprisingly his disease was cured. He was able to tame the elephant and tie it with a huge rope. The elephant died after a few days.

The Bhunjias were rendering free service to the Raja. It is said that the Bhunjia Bandh of Patnagarh is the contribution of the Bhunjia people of Sunabeda as a token of the Bethi system during *rajuda*.

The Bhunjia Hero: Tulsiveer

I will tell you the story of Bhunjia Hero Tulsiveer
He lived in a village named Soseng
Soseng was a village 12-*Kos* (3km) long and 12-*Kos* wide.
The tiger and the goat were drinking water together
from the pond.
That was the Bhunjia village.
When the priest called his Goddess 'Ma'
The Goddess replied 'Oh my son
Why have you called me?'
I am going to tell the story of a place
Where each and every tree has a god or goddess,
Every stone has a legend,
Every river is a goddess,
Every hill has a god with a story.
The whole Sunabeda is a *sarag* - heaven,
Where Mahadeo started cultivation, and
Bhima brought rain from Indra, his uncle.
That was the village.
An old man lived in that village.
He had a wife and only son Tulsiveer
The old man was the *Makaddam* - village administrative head.
He looked after the well being of the community.
Indra - the rain god, poured water down regularly.
The harvest was ample. Goddess Sunadi protected the subjects from all miseries.
One year, Indra did not allot rain. That year, the allotment of water in the heaven was in the hands of Brahminen (a Brahmin woman)
And so there was a drought owing to failure of rains.
All the *Sian lok* of the community sat together
And decided to request the headman to dig a *sagar*.
All of them went to the *Makaddam* and said,
'We all have come to you for a solution.'
The *Makaddam* gave them tobacco and fire.
All sat together and *Makaddam* asked,
'Yes, why have you come here?
Tell me whether I can help you.'
They said, 'There is a terrible scarcity of water.
Please dig a *sagar* in our village and save the subjects.'
Makaddam said, 'yes, we will dig a pond.'
Saying this, he organized community labour.
Everyone in the locality joined in digging the pond.

And lo! Within one month a huge *sagar* had been dug up.
But, Alas! There was not a single drop of water in it.
Makaddam put his hand on his cheek and thought,
Why did the pond not give water?
Makaddam went to the Goddess Sunadi
and asked, 'oh ma! We have never neglected you in worship
Why are you angry with us.
Please understand the misery of our people.
See the misery of the animals and birds.
Trees and creepers.'
Goddess replied to the *Makaddam*,
'Oh headman, the pond will never give you any water
As long as your son is alive in the *manjapur* (earth).
If you sacrifice your son to the Earth Goddess in the pond,
Then water will spring forth.
The *Makaddam* returned home, sorrowful and speechless.
His wife asked, 'why is water not springing forth from the pond?
Have you done anything unjust?'
The *Makaddam* said, 'unless we sacrifice our son
in the pond and appease the earth Goddess,
no water will come forth.'
They decided to sacrifice their only son to the earth goddess
for the well being of the subjects.
Their daughter-in-law heard this decision.

✤✤✤✤✤— Singer of version documented by author.

It was evening.
Tulsiveer returned from the forest.
His wife gave him food in the golden and silver plates.
Tulsiveer asked, 'neither today nor yesterday,
You gave me food in the golden plate,
Why have you served food in the
Golden and silver plates today?'
His wife replied,
'Your father will sacrifice you in the pond tomorrow
To get water for the people.
So for today, I wished to offer you food in the golden and silver plates.'
Tulsiveer, knowing of the sacrifice, fled in the middle of the night with his wife to a far-off place.
They built a hut in the forest near Tarajher hill.
They survived with the food they had brought with them.

Their food was finished and Tulsi told his wife, 'Let me go to the forest and hunt. You boil the water and wait for my return. When I come back we shall cook the meat and enjoy.'
After her husband went into the forest,
She climbed a tree to see if fire was available.
She found smoke touching the sky from a place.
She got down from the tree.
And headed towards the place to fetch the fire.
A young Bhunjia man was making a fire.
Tulsiveer's wife asked him for fire.
The young man was handsome
With muscular arms and a wide chest
Attractive and dark like a *kendu* tree.
She fell in love with that man.
The young man was making a fire with the straw rope.
He gave her a rope with fire and she returned home.
Tulsi came back with the hunt. They cooked food and ate.
Next day Tulsi again went to hunt.
His wife again went to get fire.
Gradually, they looked at each other,
Talked to each other in isolation,
Touched each other and developed a fascination for each other.
Uncontrolled, passionate, they broke the social rules
The unfaithful woman betrayed her husband.
This is the way of the world.
Even if they have a husband like Arjun,
they will still want another unknown man.
It is told that the heart of a woman is unknown to God.
One day the young man said to Tulsi's wife,
If you kill your husband then we both can live happily.
He thought of a plan to kill Tulsiveer.

✤✤✤✤✤— Singer of version documented by author.

One day Tulsiveer came with his hunt
He found his wife sleeping.
Looking at her husband she cried,
'Oh! I have a pain in my ear,
If the milk of a snake is not poured into my ear,
I will not be cured, and I will die.'
Tulsiveer loved his wife more than his life.
He set out to fetch the milk of a snake

He took an arrow and went to fetch snake-milk.
He found two snake-kids drinking milk from a pot.
Tulsi killed the two snake-kids and brought the milk.
He offered the milk of the snake to his wife.
She was astonished that her husband had come back.
She took the milk and pretended to pour it into her ear but threw it away.
After some days ,
when Tulsiveer was absent.
She went to her lover and said,
'Oh my dear, my husband came back with the snake-milk.
What can I do next?
How will he die?'
The young man said,
'Now you tell your husband
That the ache has not reduced and
Unless tigress' milk is brought, the pain will not go.'
She came back and again slept, making her face gloomy like a *bandu* bird
Tulsiveer asked, 'what happened to you?
Why are you looking gloomy?
What is making you so pensive?'
She said, 'my ear is still aching.
Unless you fetch tigress' milk,
my pain will not reduce.'
Tulsiveer was very fond of his wife.
He said, 'oh! don't worry, I will get tigress' milk to cure you.'
He went to the jungle to get the tigress' milk.
He found tiger cubs sitting in a cave.
The place was dirty with urine and faeces,
Tulsiveer cleaned the cave and fed the cubs with meat.
He also cleaned the cubs' bodies with water.
He climbed onto a tree to watch for the tigress.
The tigress came back.
She was astonished to see the clean cave and
Also the cubs looking clean.
She asked the cubs, 'who cleaned this cave and who made you so clean.'
The cubs showed their mother the tree.
The tigress asked, 'oh young man! Why have you come here?
What do you want?
Why did you clean my cave and my cubs?'
Tulsiveer said,
'Oh tigress! My wife is suffering from ear pain.
Unless I take some milk from you she will not be cured.'

Hearing this, the tigress offered him the milk.
She also said, 'you have taken care of my cubs,
so you can take one of my cubs with you.
When your wife sees my cub,
she will believe that you have
Really brought milk from a tigress.'
He returned home and offered the milk.
His wife was surprised to see the tiger cub and the milk.
She could not think anymore.
Tulsi took care of the cub and reared it in his house.
After a month
Tulsi's wife went to her lover when her husband was absent
And told him everything.
Her lover said, 'tell him to ride up a hill and go to the other side of it to get water from the Raital Sagar.
The pond is so deep that if somebody gets down into it, he can't come back.
He will lose his life in the deep water.'
She returned home.
Again she played the same act.
She said, 'I want water from the Raital sagar
Go and fetch it. Or else I will die of pain'
Tulsiveer replied,
'I will sacrifice my life for you, don't worry,
I will get the water from Raital sagar.'
Tulsi went to Raital sagar.
He climbed the hill and came to the Sagar
and found that the water looked a deep blue,
had no steps to go down or come up.
He thought, 'if I do not get this water
my beloved wife will die.
If I enter into the sagar,
I will die
Oh ma Sunadi! What shall I do?
Save me from dangers.'
Out of anguish, he cried helplessly.

✤✤✤✤✤— Singer of version documented by author.

Hearing the cry of Tulsiveer
A Vanakanya
Came near him and asked,
'Oh young man, why are you crying?
What is the reason?'
Tulsiveer narrated everything to her.
The Vanakanya said, 'if you will agree to my condition,
I will get water from the sagar for you.'
He agreed to it.
Vanakanya said, 'if I bring you water, you must marry me.'
Tulsiveer agreed to it. He only wanted to save his wife's life.
So the Vanakanya dived into the sagar and got water for Tulsiveer.
The maiden offered him a flower garland and said,
'From today I am your slave.
Please give me shelter.'
Tulsiveer married her, with the sun and moon as witnesses.
Witnesses were the forest trees, the birds, and animals.
Tulsiveer took that water, and returned home
And gave it to his wife.
Tulsiveer had come to his home after walking a long distance.
He was extremely tired and slept deeply.
His wife thought, 'I gave him three tasks.
Even after that he did not die.'
She brought an axe and chopped off the head of her sleeping husband.
Tulsiveer died while in deep slumber.
She went to her lover and lived with him.
When Tulsiveer died, the pond
dug by his father immediately started springing water.
Tulsiveer's father came to know that his son had died.
Tulsiveer's father was grieved.
He lamented,
'It was me whose pyre you should have lit, I am an unfortunate father
That being a father I have to do the funeral rites of my son. I should have died earlier and my son should have given his shoulder to me. This is fate.'
He started out to fetch his son's dead body to perform the funeral rites. He went to the other side of the hill where Tulsiveer lived.
The tiger cub was staying in Tulsiveer's hut. He saw that the body of Tulsiveer was in two pieces. The cub took the head and body of Tulsi and went to the Vanakanya.
The Vanakanya saw that her husband had been beheaded.
She took the head and body on her lap and cried for seven days and seven nights.

She lamented,
'Oh beloved, I was fascinated by you.
You are a person who respects words,
How did you die?
How did someone dare to kill you?
You are so truthful
You married me,
and went away leaving me in this forest?
When there is a sky there is a bird
When there is a pond there are fish
Where there is a woman, a man is destined for her.
how could fate take you away from me?
How could fate write this on my forehead for me to suffer?'
Vanadevi - forest goddess,
listening to the laments of the maiden
with compassion, appeared and said,
'Oh my daughter, what happened to you?
Why are you crying?'
She said, 'my husband was killed by his first wife.
I have married him. I want to get his life back.
He had assured me that we would live together after saving his wife's life.'
Vanadevi took pity on her
She touched the dead body of Tulsiveer and he came back to life.
Vanakanya and the tiger cub told Tulsiveer everything that had happened.
Tulsiveer wanted an elephant.
Vanakanya called an elephant and gave it to Tulsiveer.
Tulsiveer wanted a magic sword from *Vanadevi* and got that too.
Tulsiveer, Vanakanya, and the tiger cub rode on the elephant to the first wife's lover.
They discovered them there,
And Tulsiveer killed them both.

Tulsiveer's father who was searching for his son finally reached the hill and found him with the Vanakanya and the tiger cub. He brought them all back to his village. On reaching the village, he worshipped the Earth mother goddess and offered a sacrifice.

The pond filled with water and the people were proud of the deeds of Tulsiveer.

Allah-Udal

(*Allah-Udal* is a popular narrative song found both in oral and written forms in the Hindi-speaking areas of eastern Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and some parts of Uttar Pradesh. The written form is available but the oral form is only recited by the singer in the rural areas.)

Set against the backdrop of the historical ruins of Manikgarh, Jumlagarh and Mardagarh, the epic story of *Allah-Udal* is recited by the local singers in Chhatishgarh language. The song was collected by Sri D.P. Tripathy (the sub-collector of Nuapada district in 1942) when he was the sub-divisional officer. The story form of the song is given below. It is believed that the *Allah-Udal* song was recited by the senior persons to teach the younger generation. Also, they used to sing the song for rain but it has no ritual affiliation.

The Text

In the twelfth century, Prithviraj, a Chauhan king, ruled over Delhi. Parimal, the Chandel king of the Bundelkhand kingdom, ruled the capital city of Mahoba. The name of his queen was Malhanadevi. They were childless, so they adopted the two sons of General Jayasal - Allah and Udal. During that period, Manikgarh was a powerful kingdom and it was ruled by king Bikham. He had a fort on the hilltop. The place of entry into the fort was known only to the people in the fort, so outsiders were unable to enter. King Bikham had a beautiful daughter.

One day, Jayasal, the General of Mahoba, reached Manikgarh through the Mahakantar forest. He heard that king Bikham had a beautiful daughter. He tried to enter the fort to see the princess, but failed. The General's horse then fell into a mud pit, and taking this opportunity, the soldiers of Bikham beheaded Jayasal. The king hung the head of Jayasal at the gate of his fort with a sign which read that in the future, nobody should dare to want to see his daughter. He felt proud at humiliating the chopped head of the General of Mahoba.

Duarsani, the fort goddess of Manikgarh, did not like the king's arrogant act. She appeared in his dream and said, 'you killed the warrior Jayasal when he was helpless. You also hung his head on the front door. This is an unjust act and improper behaviour on the part of a warrior towards another hero. So I do not want to stay here anymore.' Duarsani left Manikgarh.

The tragic news of the death of Jayasal reached Mahoba. When the two sons Allah and Udal heard of their father's unceremonious death in Manikgarh, they took a vow to take revenge on their father's killer. The King of Mahoba was reluctant to send a huge troupe of soldiers to Manikgarh to fight king Bikham, but finally he agreed. They camped near Dharmbhandha village. As the fort was at the hilltop, they tried to climb the hills and enter the fort, but failed.

Bikham, king of Manikgarh, knew that Allah and Udal had arrived at Manikgarh. He had three Generals. The first one was Manik (elephant rider), second was Makund (horse rider), and the third was Sundar (Bull rider). There was a formidable battle between the Generals and Allah-Udal .The soldiers of Manikgarh were at the hilltop. The soldiers of Mahoba were at the foot of the hill. There was no hope of victory. The three sides of the fort were surrounded by hills and the only way to the fort was obstructed by the river Jonk. Allah-Udal tried to connect the banks of the river by making a bridge. They

then occupied the fort and killed the king and his family. Manik and Makund fled. The whereabouts of Sundar was not known to anybody. People believe that the bull and the third General Sundar turned into stone images. The stone bull and the stone ***Jogisundar*** (Buddha image) are said to be images of Sunder and his bull.

Allah and Udal returned to Mahoba with the cut head of their father .It was told that Allah also fought with Prithviraj, the king of Delhi.

Allah-Udal (Bhunjia in Sunabeda version), Kamla Sati and Ramai Deo

In Maraguda fort, there was a Bhunjia king named Balibhikam. He ruled over the Sunabeda region also. He would come to Sunabeda for hunting as it was his territory.

One day, the soldiers of King Jayasal entered the Sunabeda forest for hunting. While they were returning from the hunt, the soldiers of King Balibhikam saw them. The two armies fought for one having encroached into the other's jungle. The soldiers of the Bhunjia king said that because the Sunabeda plateau was King Balibhikam's territory, others were not allowed to enter the forest to hunt.

The soldiers of King Jayasal went to their king and explained the importance of the Sunabeda jungle. They also demanded that the area be conquered and merged with their kingdom. The king agreed to it and conjured up a strategy to fight against King Balibhikam. Both the kings got ready for a war. Balibhikam made roads in all the hills of Sunabeda. The names of the hills are Beniadhas, Kharaldhas, Godhas, Jogidhas, and Giri Brahman. At the end of the road at the top of the hill, he dug a huge pit, assuming that the soldiers of Jayasal would come through the road on horseback and finally fall into the huge pit, and that they would not be able to come out of it.

A formidable war took place between the two kings. The soldiers of Jayasal ran on the roads made on the hills and at last, not knowing about the huge pit, fell into it and lost their lives.

Jayasal, with his soldiers dead, ran away out of fear but his horse got stuck in a huge mud pit (*jalki*). He could not come out. Taking this opportunity, Balibhikam killed Jayasal. The soldiers of Jayasal were all killed in the hills. So the hills were named Beniadhas, Kharaldhas and Jogidhas (Dhas, from 'dhwans' meaning devastation) thus signifying the remnants of the devastation.

Jayasal lost his life in the battle. Meanwhile, his Queen Deola was pregnant and she gave birth to two sons named Allah and Udal. Deola's brother Mahil, brought up his two nephews and taught them *shaastra*-knowledge and *sastra*-weaponry. Allah and Udal grew up to be two young warriors. Allah became the king and Udal helped him. One day, Mahil narrated the story of Jayasal's death to Allah and Udal. After listening to it, the two brothers promised to avenge their father's death.

King Balibhikam had three queens, but they were childless. One day, Allah and Udal sent a message to King Balibhikam inviting him for a duel. Balibhikam accepted the challenge to fight the two brothers. During that period, Kamla Sati, Balibhikam's queen was pregnant.

He told his pregnant queen, 'I will go for a fight with Allah and Udal. I will take a pigeon with me. If I am defeated and killed by my enemies, then the pigeon will come back to you. When you find the pigeon in your presence, you should leave Maraguda to save your life'. Balibhikam had grown old. After some time, Allah and Udal attacked Maraguda. A great battle was fought and Balibhikam was killed. The pigeon that was with Balibhikam flew to the queens. All the queens advised Kamala Sati to leave the palace to save the clan. Kamala Sati fled to Gadbhata village near Sunabeda. She planned to build a fort there. But Maraguda was very close to Gadbhata and she was prone to enemy attacks. So, she changed her place to Sandohel hill. There she gave birth to a male child and lay unconscious.

There lived a Binjhal and his wife on that hill. They used to collect firewood and sell them to a Brahmin in Ghagurli village. That day, when the Binjhal and his wife went to collect firewood, they found that a woman had given birth to a baby and was lying unconscious. Looking at Kamala Sati, they concluded her to be a woman belonging to the royal family. They tried to cut the umbilical cord with an arrow, but failed. At last, they cut the cord with a bamboo blade. Then the Binjhal and his wife took the mother and baby to Ghagurli. A Brahmin of Ghagurli village gave shelter to Kamala Sati and her son, Ramai Deo.

Ramai, Kamala sati's son grew up and went to the fields to tend cows. One day, Ramai went into the jungle with the cattle, and could not return because of heavy rains. He was resting under a tree when a snake appeared and spread its hood over Ramai Deo's head to shelter him from the rain. Ramai Deo slept under the tree, unaware of the snake.

In the morning, the Brahmin and Ramai's mother went to the jungle and found Ramai sleeping under the hood of a snake. Looking at the Brahmin, the snake disappeared. The Brahmin told Kamala that Ramai would be a great man. They brought Ramai back home. The Brahmin gave Ramai a good education, both in *shastra*-knowledge and *sastra*-weaponry.

In Patna city, the capital of South Koshala, there was a legendary story that there was a snake in the womb of the Queen of Patna. When the queen was sleeping with the king, the snake came out of the queen's womb and bit the king. The king died and his brother was coronated. The snake bit the king's brother too. So it was difficult to govern Patna state. So one senior man from each family came forward to become the king and rule Patna state everyday and the next morning he would be found dead. There were seven Mallicks-Paiks who were cremating the dead bodies everyday. And it was the turn of the Brahmin of Ghagurli village.

The Brahmin and his family were worried. Meanwhile, Ramaicame to know of this. He asked his mother to allow him to go to the capital instead of the Brahmin. Kamala agreed but put forth three conditions. She said that

1. With a sword that she would give, the snake had to be cut to pieces and burnt to ashes when it sprung out of the queen's womb.

2. They should not sleep at night, they should be awake and aware of enemies.
3. In the morning, when the seven Mallicks came they should also be killed.

'Only then can you be the king of Patna', she said.

Ramaipromised to fulfil the conditions.

Next morning, the Mallicks came to Ghagurli and took Ramai Deo instead of the old Brahmin, to coronate him as the king of Patna. During the day, Ramai ruled the kingdom and at night he went to the queen. The queen slept, but Ramai Deo did not. At midnight, the snake came out of the queen's womb and when it was about to bite Ramai Deo he cut it to pieces and burnt it.

In the morning, when the seven Mallicks came to get the dead body of Ramai Deo, he, all of a sudden, attacked the Mallicks and cut off their heads. The queen got up and found that the king Ramai Deo had not died. People also came to know of this and were very happy to have a brave warrior like Ramai Deo as their King. People called him Ramai Kumar Raja. The marriage of Ramai was instituted with the queen and Ramai Deo lived happily.

The Epic of Kachhra Dhurua

Maraguda and Bindra Nuagarh (Chhatishgarh) were a part of the Bhunjia kingdom. Before the invasion of the Chauhan in western Orissa, the Rajgonds ascended the throne (*Gadi*) from the Bindra Nuagarh. Lanjigarh, which was adjacent to Bindra Nuagarh, was captured by Singhal Sai, a Gond warrior. Chhuragarh was a part of Maradagarh. A Bhunjia king was ruling over this land. The Bhunjia kings knew that the Gond King Singhal Sai was trying to capture their territory. So, they killed Singhal Sai by poisoning his food.

The pregnant queen of Singhal Sai fled to Patna and took shelter in a Brahmin's house. While the queen was sweeping the house with a broom, she gave birth to a boy. Because she was sweeping the *kachhra*, the baby was named as Kachhra Dhurua. From early childhood, Kachhra proved to be a hero. He joined the Patna king's army. The Maharaja of Patna had many enemies and Kachhra Dhurua subdued all of them. The Maharaja of Patna was pleased with Kachhra Dhurua and asked him what he would like to have. Kachhra Dhurua asked for Mardagarh region as a prize. The king was happy. He attacked the Bhunjia king of Maraguda and killed him and gave iut to Kachhra Dhurua. Thus the Gond warriors ruled Maraguda. After that the Bhunjias were subdued by the Gonds.

Bhunija Culture Hero

Kholagarh was a part of Deobhog where the three gods, namely, Pandra pat, Dhurua pat and Maskul pat were worshipped.

A Bhunjia king was ruling over Kholagarh. Kumdaphulia, a Gond king, killed the Bhunjia king and all his people. The Bhunjia king's pregnant wife fled from the Gond

enemies and took shelter in a potter's pit. The potter found the queen and gave her refuge. The queen gave birth to a boy baby. He was known as Bhunjia veer. In Kholagarh, the goddess of Bhunjias remained unworshipped. She wanted to get the queen's son as her priest. The queen's son became a tantric, endowed with esoteric knowledge such as magic and shamanism. The Gond king Kumdaphulia had engaged the Banjara to be his guardian. Bhunjia veer, by his magic, made all the soldiers dumb. He then killed King Kumdaphulia and took revenge on his father's enemy and regained his kingdom.

(Narrated by Diga Chinda, Khalna)

Interpretations of Bhunjia Folk Epics

Bhunjia myths and oral epics represent the co-existence of Gods (ancestors) and the mortal Bhunjias. The Bhunjia have their esoteric meaning of the animate and inanimate natural world around them. The hills and mountains have a local history associated with the Bhunjia's oral history. They do not have a caste bard. But as mentioned earlier, worship is performed by the Bhunjia (Bhunjiekar Devta) himself, which signifies their strong belief and interaction with the other world. Bhunjia people, located in Sunabeda plateau and being 950m above the sea level, are considered *uparar lok* - men of highland. People of the plain land are called *talar lok* - people living below the high land, in plain land.

Geographically, the Sunabeda plateau is a highland, about 3400 feet above sea level, where the Gonds, Bhunjias, and Kamars live together. The people who live in the plateau are highlanders called Choktia Bhunjia and the Bhunjia living in the plains are called Chinda Bhunjia. As the Bhunjias are isolated from the plain landers - *talar lok* - they are lesser exposed to the wider world, as revealed in the epic *Mandhar Majhi*. Their long association with nature and their inter-dependence with nature and the spiritual world has a meaning of living an integrated life. Man, animal, nature, and the gods and goddess have a strong inter-relation. The hills and mountains are dedicated either to a god or a goddess; the rivers are named after goddesses; the villages, ponds, caves, and natural rocks are imagined in Bhunjia creativity as the creation of gods and goddesses. Therefore, inter-changeability of man and god, and believing in magic and tantra find prime importance.

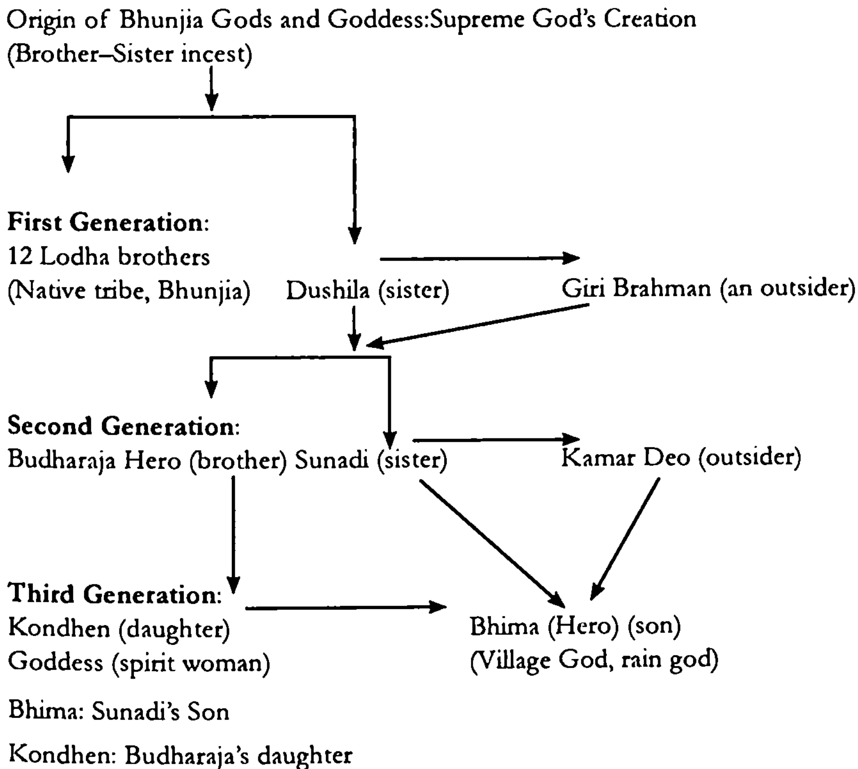
Bhunjia is a small ethnic group identified in a particular place with their distinct culture system. Their knowledge is esoteric. They maintain racial purity. Even a girl, after getting married, when she visits her father's house, is denied entry into the kitchen; she is not allowed to cook food. If touched by an outsider, the *lal bangla* is burnt to ashes and a new hut is built. Bhunjia women are not allowed to sleep on cots – they are allowed to sleep only on the floor on bamboo mats.

The oral myths and epics of the Bhunjia community are divided into three. One is dedicated to the origin of gods and goddesses (Sunadi, Budharaja); another epic – *Mandhar Majhi* is an oral history of their close association with the Chauhan king of Patna; *Tulsiveer* is a romantic epic, a narration of how a hero was faithful to his unfaithful wife. This epic also has a close relation with goddess and spiritualism.

In Bhunjia epic, both gods and goddesses and human heroes and heroines have played a combined role. There is no distinction between man and spirit. The myths of the Bhunjia reveal that the Gods and Goddesses had a family tree and kinship network in a specific territory. Two Bhunjia myths are closely associated with goddess Sunadi as she is the central character. The myths are found not in the form of a complete whole, but in an episodic form by which the logical sequence of the plot can be arranged through several events. This also determines the temporal aspects of Bhunjia myth. The origin myths of the Bhunjia gods/goddesses reveal that Budharaja (the brother) and Sunadi (the sister) were, at some point of time, human beings and owing to their heroic and supernatural deeds, deified.

Goddess Sunadi is the central character in the mythical epic. In the origin myth of Sunadi and Budharaja, it is narrated that Dushila (Sunadi's mother) was made pregnant by a Brahmin sage in the forest and she had two children, Budharaja and Sunadi. In the myth, the man (Brahmin) is insignificant.

The myth of Sunadi can be understood from the following diagram.



Marriage of Bhima and Kondhen (cross-cousin marriage)

In the second myth, Sunadi was found involved with Kamar Deo of Khalari region and she gave birth to a child (Bhima). Sunadi was exiled for this by her brother Budharaja from his house, but then accepted back after she fulfilled the condition of getting gold from land.

Budha Deo gave his daughter Kondhen in marriage to his sister's son. Cross-cousin marriage is a social custom in the Bhunjia community.

Origin of the Bhunjia god, Budha Deo (Budharaja), and goddess Sunadi was from the union of a lodha woman (Dushila) and an outsider – a Brahmin. The Brahmin was an enemy of the Lodhas. So they killed him despite knowing that their sister had been made pregnant by him. But they did not abandon the child she gave birth to, who subsequently became a god (Budhadeo) and the sister became Sunadi (present Bhunjia goddess). Existence of a Brahmin in Bhunjia myth reveals the existence a rivalry between tribals and non-tribals.

'Origin of Choktia Bhunjia' is another mythical epic of racial affiliation in which the seven Gond brothers of Dhamdagarh were married to seven Dhurua Sisters of Grudger (Sunabeda) and their first son was Choktia Bhunjia. The division of the seven clans of Choktia Bhunjia according to the distribution of labour and to render services to the goddess is narrated in the myth. Whatever is narrated in the myth is validated in the social practice and customs of the Bhunjia community today.

The social customs defined by Sunadi to the seven brothers are

1. *lal bangla* – a small kitchen-hut in front of a Bhunjia house which is sacred,
2. Outsiders cannot touch the kitchen,
3. Food will be cooked in the kitchen, but they should not eat the food there,
4. Prohibition from taking food in a non-Bhunjia's house,
5. All the married and unmarried girls are forbidden from wearing underwear and blouse,
6. Married women should wear only a white *saree,*
7. The women should not take double-boiled rice,
8. No man or woman should use a cot, everyone should sleep on the ground.

The rules are strictly followed even today. If any outsider touches the kitchen, the kitchen is burnt and a new hut is constructed.

If any outsider sits on their verenda, the earth on that spot is dug and thrown out, and fresh earth is pasted there with cow dung-water to purify the place.

Sunadi then distributed occupations among the seven brothers.

Occupation of Choktia Bhunjia

The seven brothers of Choktia Bhunjia are

1. *Karria* or *Bad* Majhi (sword keeper and sacrificer of animals before the goddess),
2. *Jhankar* (priest, worshipper of *Kokaduma* - ancestor spirit),
3. *Pujari* (shaman),
4. *Bhoi* (cook),
5. Barik (bearer of Sunadi's dress and ornaments),
6. *Dhurua* (bearer of carpet) and
7. *Chandua* (bearer of the *chandua* - tent over the worship place, and also during the procession).

Since then, the seven brothers have settled down in Sunabeda. They all stayed in a *chok* so they were called Choktia Bhunjia.

Mandhar Majhi: The Tribal Chief of Sunabeda

When Mandhar, the tribal chief of Sunabeda was imprisoned, his brothers and the Bhunjia priests (tantric) rescued him through magical/supernatural means. They took the tigers of Sunabeda to the capital of Patna and the king had to submit to the tribal priests and free Mandhar Majhi. The aim of the epic is to show the power of the tribal chiefs as opposed to the political power of the king. It is evident from local history that the Kshatriya kings submitted to the tribal gods and goddesses and even worshipped them as fort goddesses (*Gadadevi*). The tribal chiefs with their supernatural powers, challenged the administrative powers of the king. The only conflict between the tribal chiefs and the king was for the payment of land revenue tax which was a difficult task for the tribal chiefs. The cultural plurality of the urban kings with a different economic order from that of the tribals', to generate revenue through cultivation among the non-tribals in the plains as opposed to the non-productive tribal chief's traditional forest economic order was the basis of conflict. The tribal chief's inability to cope with the feudal administrative order, on the one hand, and also to maintain his social dominance over his own people on the other, was a challenge to the tribal chief. Another important aspect is that of group identity. When Mandhar Majhi was jailed owing to a misunderstanding between him and the King of Patna (failing to pay revenue to the king of Patna maybe the real reason), the Bhunjia community had assembled and decided to free their chief from the clutches of the king.

Bhunjia are the tribe with enormous supernatural powers. The saying *Bhunjekar devta* (the gods and goddesses are owned by the Bhunjia) signifies that society and administration were subject to the control or influence of the spiritual world. The non-tribal kings and village chiefs were under the religious jurisdiction of the tribal priests. In tribal India, the political power was in the hands of the religious power. In many parts

of Orissa, many non-tribal rulers have adopted tribal goddesses as their fort goddess. One is Rakatmauli (the Kondh goddess of Chaura) of Hatibandha village who has been aryanized to become Raktambari, and is now worshipped in the palace of Khariar.

Mandhar Majhi, the tribal chief of Sunabeda plateau was not able to cope with the changing political order as he was in a secluded highland (Sunabeda plateau). His naturalistic worldview was entirely different from the feudal worldview. Even for Mandhar, the tribal chief of the Bhunjia, entering the court of the King and understanding the king's language must have been a great challenge. He was unable to understand the command of the king and was the object of humour and humiliation in the court. Therefore, he tried to compensate the loss of political face through spiritual power. The king's acceptance of tribal deities is a move of political diplomacy to appease the local tribal chiefs to help in running the administration. It is evident from local history that in Kalahandi, the Kondhs and the Gonds did not care about the kings, as they were the landowners before the emergence of the Naga and Chauhan. The Kings were appeasing the tribal gods and goddess by accepting them as the fort deities.

It may also be noted here that before the British Raj and the tribals' settling down, the tribal chiefs were not paying any tax to the kings and were enjoying the forest. On the other hand, the land grabbers were always taking land from the king by paying the necessary tax, and the land and village administration was transferred to the non-tribal chief in a village.

In *Tulsiveer*, a romantic epic of the Bhunjia, the hero is faithful to his wife. But his wife was an unfaithful woman. She was in love with another youth and had conspired to kill her husband. She gave three difficult tasks to her husband: getting snake milk, getting tiger milk, and getting water from the Raital sagar. The hero came out successful in all the three tasks by the grace of the goddess. A forest maiden, Vanakanya, helped the hero. When the hero comes to his wife, she kills him. This dead body of the hero is rescued by Vanakanya from the jungle and as a result of her penance, the hero gets his life back. The dry pond in the hero's village gives water after the hero kills his wife .It is believed that after a human sacrifice the dry pond would give water. The hero's marriage with the forest maiden signifies his lost glory and compensation for the loss of his first wife. The epic is also full of miracles and supernatural events. This epic is a model where the hero is chaste and heroine unchaste. Also, the goddess and even the animals are helpful to the hero.

Allah-Udal is a historical-legend epic of the Laria-speaking region of Nuapada (Kalahandi). Two episodes of two generations are interwoven in this epic. The first one is concerned with the Manikgarh fort where Allah and Udal, two brothers, sought revenge of their father's (Jayasal) enemy, Bhikam, the Bhunjia King of Maraguda. The second episode is that of Ramai Deo. In fact, Ramai Deo is the son of Hamir Deo (who had died by the time Ramai Deo was born) and Queen Ashavati, who belongs to the Chauhan lineage. But in folk epic, Bhikam's pregnant Queen Kamala sati fled when Allah–Udal killed her husband. She gave birth to Ramai. Another version of

Allah–Udal reveals that the Bhikam was punished and put to death. The influence of *Ramai Deo* epic is seen in the episode of Allah–Udal. The history related to the Chauhan origin in western Orissa (around fourteenth century A.D.) is still found in the collective memory of the people of the Manikgarh region.

Some observations on Bhunjia oral epics and myths are:

1. A hero is always capable of solving the people's problems and shows leadership qualities. The symbol of a tiger, or snake eating the people are symbols of group psychology. People are victimized everyday, but they wait for a hero to solve their common problems and save them.

2. Projection of women in Bhunjia society and culture: A woman in the Bhunjia society has to follow strict social rules. After she marries, she is not allowed to enter the kitchen in her father's house. When a Bhunjia woman arrives with her husband after marriage, she is given hospitality in her uncle's house, and under no circumstance is she allowed entry into the kitchen. This indicates that a woman after marriage is considered impure, because she is married to a man of another clan. The concept of purity in sex, and maintenance of social customs is strictly followed in Bhunjia community. Women are considered impure. Dushila, mother of Sunadi, was in love with Kamar Deo. Vanakany*a* fell in love with Tulsiveer and Tulsiveer's wife fell in love with another man. This indicates that love is universal, cutting across the social customs and rules. But at the same time, chaste women are also found in the epic story of *Tulsiveer.*

Inter-tribal marriage relations (of Gond girls with Bhunjia heroes) are narrated in many myths and epics.

9

BANJARA ORAL EPIC

The Banjara are one of the nomadic and pastoral communities of Rajasthan adjoining Central India. From the Mughal era, they have been known as a heroic race. They are distributed over many parts of Central India adjoining western Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In Orissa, they are considered a scheduled tribe, whereas in Chhatishgarh they are non-tribal.

Some ethnographers are of the opinion that the Banjaras originated from the Charana caste or the Bhat race. They were the warriors of Rajputna. It is said that Parasuram, after killing the Kshatriya 21 times, the charanas abandoned agriculture and adopted the warrior profession, so they were degraded in agriculture, and after that they started to many parts of India for their livelihood. But still they maintain their culture and tradition.

Their supreme goddess is Meramma. Banjaran Dai is also worshipped along the route of their migration to Rajasthan. The idol of goddess Banjaran Dai is found along the roads in many parts of western Orissa and Chhatishgarh. The Banjaras worship the goddess and at a certain time of the year assemble at a place and worship her.

The Banjara are divided in to four clans.

1. 27-pada Bhukhia clan (Mud, Rather, Muchha, Alut, Bapat, etc.)
2. 13-pada Parmar clan
3. 6-pada Chauhan clan and
4. 1-pada malka clan.

Another form of clan distribution is also found among the Banjaras. They are Bhukhai, Lawadia, Jharbarla, Ortia, and Turi. Some castes such as *Nai, Bhat, Dhalia, Tadi, Labhan,* and *Yogi* are present with the Banjara tribe. All these castes speak the Banjara language because there was a group migration from one place to another. Nowadays, these people have settled in the villages of Kalahandi and Chhatishgarh.

Meramma is their supreme goddess and Mithu Bhukhia Sewa bhaya is the first worshipper of Goddess Meramma.

The Banjara people are fond of music and dance. Their dresses and turban differentiate them from the other tribal communities of Kalahandi. Their rites and rituals, fairs and festivals, rites of passage, and the gods and goddesses are different from the tribal culture of Kalahandi.

The Banjara have their own singer community known as Bhat. The song collected from the singers is Mithu Bhukhia Sewa Bhaya, which is a mythical one. Meramma wanted Sewa Bhaya to be her first worshipper but Sewa Bhaya did not agree to it. Finally, she showed her furious form to Sewa Bhaya and Sewa Bhaya worshipped her.

Besides, there are origin myths of local gods and goddesses. Interestingly, many local tribes of Kalahandi have altered the origin myth of the Banjara goddess to suit their local history.

The oral epics in the Banjara language are available among the people of the Banjara community. But, this is also a genre in danger of disappearance as they are also a part of the social change. But the old men among the Banjara people sing the epic of *Raja Isalu*, *Lakha Banjara*, *Sitaram Nayak*, *Rama Heru*, etc.

The most fascinating epics in the Banjara language are *Raja Isalu*, *Ramji Huna sati* and *Hiro Diwani*. A translated version of the original epics is presented here.

Raja Isalu

The Banjara bhat (singer) used to initiate the epic song by posing some riddles in the form of songs. This signifies the social and eternal truth of mankind.

He sings:

Ana Kadi Suna Rahiye,
Ke Dhartira Mandana kunachhare
Ke Rajar Kunachhare Ram,

Oh! I am singing,
I am saying, listen to me
Who decorates the Earth
Who is the king of the earth?

After questioning he answers:

Ana Kadi Suna Rahiye

Earth is decorated with grass,
So grass is the king of the earth.
Who decorates the mountain and hills?
- The tree

Who decorates the home?
- A wife

When does the son's strength go away?
- When his father dies.

When does the son lose his affection?
- When his mother dies, the affection of the son goes away.

When does a brother feel that his arm is broken?
- When his brother dies.

When does a brother feel that his problem is over?
- When his sister dies.

After singing these riddles, the singer says, 'I am going to tell you about the birth of a hero named Isalu'. He sings, 'At which time should the son take his birth? (he has to take birth). At that time when his mother will not face any disaster. So let us call the Brahmin and purify the house, for the birth of Isalu.' He sings,

'Call the Brahmin from the nearby town/village
He will open the palm-leaf manuscript and foretell the future of the new-born child.
Oh queen! bring the *pidha* - a seat made of sandal wood
The Brahmin will sit on that
And order for cow dung,
Splash the cow dung-water on the verandah
Adorn the walls with some paintings
Lo! See the Brahmin sitting on the sandal wood *pidha*,
with his palm-leaf canons
The Brahmin is saying,
'Your son has been born at a very bad time,
He has to face many obstacles and
He will become a *yogi*
He will go to the forest to perform penance
He will not marry,
His name will be Isalu.'
The king, Isalu's father, said,
'Throw out that old palm-leaf and consult the new canons.
You are to see what is written on the forehead of this new-born child.'
'Your son will survive in this world for twelve years.
Within these twelve years,
Your son will see the whole world.
Your son will go to *vanvas* - stay in the forest.'

✤✤✤✤✤— Singer of version documented by author.

Isalu then became a hero,
From his childhood.
He took his father's horse and
Wanted to defeat the king of Sarkat.
He said, 'If I have to win, then I will win you king.'

He was able defeat the King of Sarkat, not in war but in riddling and game of dice.

Raja Isalu, sitting on a black horse, reached the kingdom of Sarkat Raja. He saw the whole city; the people passed comments on him as he rode the horse from one street to another. The queens of Sarkat Raja saw him through the window and were fascinated by him. They called the soldiers to their presence and demanded Raja Isalu to be brought before them.

The soldiers brought Raja Isalu and the queens asked him some riddles.

Ana Kadi Suna Rahiye
Ke Dhartir Mardana Kuna Chhare
Ke Rajar Kunachha Jee Ram.
Who beautifies the earth
Who is the king of the earth, O Ram!

Raja Isalu answered:

Ana Kadi Suna Rahiye
Ke Dhartir Mandana Re
Ke Rajar Ghasachha Ji Rani.
Oh! I am answering you, listen to me
Oh! the earth is beautiful
Because of the grass,

So the grass is the king of beauties.

The riddling went on for quite a long time. At a point when the queens could not answer Isalu's riddle, they wanted to insult him.

So, the queens of Sarkat Raja said something to Raja Isalu. On hearing it King Isalu was angered and beat four *Spika* (whip) to the queen. The queen lost consciousness. On hearing this, the king came to the queen and asked, 'What happened to you? Oh! My dear queen!' The queen cried and narrated through a song:

Ana kadi suna Rahiye
Ke Kuna Sora desare, Ke musafir utara
Ke kamchhi marechha pachas
Ke bhale admi
Ke gurji tamten
Phod din ji ram.

The king then asked the Rani

Ana kadi suna Rahiye
Ke ton to marore Ke

bhala acchabhala ki dechha
Gurji tam ten phod
Dinre bhale Admi kai
Gurni tamten phod re.
Ke bhala phod dinare bhale admi.

Oh! who has beaten you?
How good he did with you?

And torn the bag of pulses that you have? (tearing a bag of pulses symbolizes an insult)

The King of Sarkat was angry with Raja Isalu. He called in his soldiers and ordered them to bring Raja Isalu to his court. On the way, he planned to drown the horse of Raja Isalu in mud, and then bring him. Isalu rode his horse and set out to meet King Sarkat. He saw the mud and asked the soldiers, 'Oh soldiers, how can I go on this muddy path?' The soldiers said, 'we go this way everyday. So you come along with your horse, nothing will happen.'

Isalu had to cross the muddy stretch. He was stuck in the mud upto his knees. Isalu reached the Durbar in that muddy dress. The king's men gave him water in a pipe, that was as long as a finger, to wash his legs. Isalu understood that the king was testing him. He brought a blade of iron and scraped the mud off his legs. Next he washed the iron blade in the little water given by the soldiers. The King of Sarkat found Isalu to be a clever man. Raja Isalu was then given good hospitality.

King Sarkat asked Isalu to narrate his stories. A strong competition started between the two kings. Isalu narrated hundreds of tales and king Sarkat matched his number.

King Sarkat asked,

Ke Arsati barsare
Ke raja bhala Utar
Ke chiri chorkada
Pyasumar muko panihari
Hato pharji Ram..........

The king came down from the rainy sky
He is heavy like an elephant
But the birds and animals are thirsty for it.
The women return without anything.
What is that?

King Isalu answered the riddle (*saki*) saying,

Ke saraga Tutantare,
Ke Bhuya bhala Padiya
Solata Udagechhba
Thikrire bhale admi

Kai sorta karore
Ke rajabhala sorta
Karila O chaji Jan.

which means,

If something from the heaven will fall,
It will fall on the earth
Oh Raja remember,
You have got it from the sky
Fallen on the tiles,
And saved it in the earth,
Remember that it save your life. (ice, water)

Then, King Sarkat invited Isalu to a game of dice. King Sarkat was defeating Isalu in stages. Isalu felt disturbed. He remembered that he had friendship with a she-serpent (*Nangni*) and a mouse.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

One day his Naga-friend (male) Mahaprasad (*mitra* or friend) had gone outside. The *Nangani* (wife of Naga) fell in love with a *dendo* (a non-poisonous) snake. Isalu saw this. He told *Nangani* that he would disclose her affair with the *dendo* snake.

Hearing this, the *Nangni* made her face gloomy and wept herself to sleep in the room. When the *Naga* came, he saw his wife was looking gloomy and asked, 'what is the matter?'

She replied, 'Am I your wife or the wife of your friend Isalu? He is coming to me everyday during your absence and trying to seduce me.'

Hearing this, the enraged Naga wanted to take revenge on Isalu. He became a small snake and entered into his friend's shoes to bite him.

At that time Isalu woke up. Some bad omen had appeared. His left eyelid throbbed and he guessed that something bad might happen. He thought and said to himself,

I have not done any wrong to anybody
nor have I harmed anybody.
Only one thing I have seen
that my friend's wife was in love with a snake.
That much I have told
her to prevent her from sin.

Hearing this, the snake which had come to bite Isalu got back his own form, appeared before him and said,

> 'Dear friend, I would have bitten you if I had not heard what you said to yourself.'

He went to his house and killed his wife. He came back to Isalu and said,

'Oh friend, I am offering you the dice that I have on my forehead. When you are in trouble or danger, remember it and you will win any game of dice.'

Another friend of Isalu had given him a small mouse to help him when in danger. The dice and the mouse were always in Isalu's secret bag. He remembered to use them now, during the game of dice to win.

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For the game of dice, the king had placed a lamp on a cat's head. The king was winning the game with that magic lamp. Isalu took the small mouse out of his bag and placed it in front of the cat. Seeing the mouse, the cat ran after it and the room plunged into darkness as the lamp was put out. Meanwhile, Isalu replaced the king's magical dice with his own.

After that both of them lit the lamp. They resumed their game. Now king Sarkat began to lose all his property, land and finally even his kingdom in the game.

King Sarkat said, 'I have been defeated. Now the land, property, and kingdom is all yours.'

Isalu said, 'what shall I do with your land and kingdom.
I have my own land and kingdom.
I will return your land and kingdom under two conditions.

First, all the people you have defeated in dice and imprisoned should be released.' Sarkat released all the prisoners,

'The next', Isalu said, 'Your queen is pregnant.
Let us tear her belly. If she will give birth to a girl child then
I will take the baby.'
If she will give a son, he will be yours,'
King Sarkat agreed to it.
The belly of the queen was torn open and a girl child came out of it.
According to the agreement
Isalu took the girl in a wooden box and left for his kingdom.

✤✤✤✤✤— Singer of version documented by author.

Isalu brought up the girl with great care. Isalu would go hunting everyday leaving the girl alone; they lived like brother and sister. One day the girl said, 'Oh king! I will go with you to hunt'. Isalu agreed and both of them went to the jungle.

In the jungle they saw a deer. Isalu said to the girl, 'let me follow the deer, while you be here'.

But the deer hid inside the dense forest.
The girl called the king and said,
'Raja Isalu, how are you going to hunt the deer?
Lend me your bow and arrow, I will kill it.'
Isalu gave his bow and arrow and the girl chased the deer.

While chasing the deer, the girl said,
'Oh deer! Whither are you running away?
chased by a man or a woman?'
The deer turned back
to see if the person was a man or a woman
The deer found that a beautiful woman
was standing behind him.
Seeing the girl's beauty, the deer was happy.
The girl told Isalu, 'Please behead the deer
Or it will run away again.'
Isalu thought, Being a man
I failed to catch the deer
And being a woman she could capture it.
I will not cut its head.
I will only cut off the ear and tail of the deer.
The deer sang,

Mata Katyo re kana puchade
Kai jinagani kag jaya khot
Ke Raja re ye maor ot Manhiru maragar tar ghareja
Ghalu hatia chor rajare'

which translates into,

'Oh don't cut my ear and tail,
It will be a black spot in my life. Oh King! My name is *Heera Mriga*,
I will engage the *Hatia* in your home.'

Isalu and the girl took the ear and tail of the deer and came back home. Isalu thought, 'now this girl has grown up. So I will call a Brahmin and drink a pot of water from her hand. The time for her marriage has come.'

He went to get a Brahmin and while coming back he ate and took rest under a tree near the pond.

The diamond deer was angry with king Isalu. He called all his deer friends to the garden of Hatia Hodi - a Banjara man.

Everyone was grazing. The gardeners tried to drive away all the deer, but failed. So they reported it to Hatia Hodi, the master of the garden, that the deer were destroying the garden. Hatia came with his people to drive out the deer. Seeing this, all the deer fled except the diamond deer. Hatia said, 'the deer will run away. Let us catch hold of it. I will punish the person who does not catch the deer when it runs towards him.' The diamond deer heard it and rushed towards Hatia Hodi and evaded him. When Hatia followed the deer, the deer drove Hatia to the palace of Raja Isalu. When the deer was close to Hatia, the deer said, 'Oh man! Why do you run after me? Just to have small pieces of meat of my body? Why don't you look into the palace? A beautiful girl is there. If you meet her you can lead a happy life with her.'

After saying this, the deer disappeared. Hatia was astonished listening to a talking deer. Then, he went to the palace gate and sang:

Tin janeror pyasu maruchha bhai,
Man pani bhala atrik deida, ji ram.

For the last three days I have been thirsty
Give me some water.

Hearing the call of Hatia Hodi, the girl came out of the palace. She drew water from the well and gave it to him. Hatia quenched his thirst with the sweet water offered by the maiden and thought, if the water offered by her is so sweet, how sweet would her lips be. He wanted to take shelter in the palace. The girl gave him shelter. Raja Isalu had gone out. So both of them had ample opportunity to interact and eventually they fell in love with each other.

The parrot in the cage was witnessing the lovemaking of Hatia Hodi and the girl. Raja Isalu had reared the parrot. The parrot flew and reached the Brahmin and his master – Raja Isalu. The parrot, sitting on the branches of the tree, was crying and tear rolled down onto the hands of Isalu. Raja Isalu looked up and found that his beloved parrot was sitting on the branches of the tree. When Raja Isalu called the parrot, it came down to the king and sat on his shoulder and narrated everything about Hatia Hodi and the girl.

Hearing this from the parrot, Raja Isalu asked the Brahmin to go back with the alms. On being asked for the reason by the Brahmin, Raja Isalu said, 'the purpose of inviting you has failed. The girl died.' The Brahmin returned with the alms.

Raja Isalu came with the parrot to his palace. In the palace, the girl was sleeping with Hatia Hodi. After sometime, the girl said to Hatia Hodi, 'please, it is better you leave this place, or else Raja Isalu will come here and we will be exposed.' But Hatia did not listen and started playing with the girl. Then the girl said, 'listen the galloping of a horse can be heard. So please go.' But Hatia, enamoured with the girl and her lovemaking, did not leave. Raja Isalu reached the palace in the meantime. The girl, out of fear, tied clothes on Hatia and hid him under the cot. Raja Isalu sat on the cot and this made Hatia tremble with fear. A bee was humming the following songs.

Bhamra Bhanan bhanan mati karo
Mati pasaro pankh pankh
Papsaro su hana hiya upara byato buonga.

Oh Bee, don't hum,
Don't widen your wings and don't hum
If you widen your wings, it will harm you
Since the snake is sitting on you.

The king knew everything but pretended to go out to relieve himself. The girl managed to get Hatia Hodi out of the palace. But King Isalu saw him on the way back. He followed Hatia on his horse and reached a pond.

There, a washerman was washing clothes. Isalu asked, 'Hey washerman! did you see a man going this way.'

The washerman said, 'yes, a man is going. Can't you see, I have torn my wife to pieces for that man.' Raja Isalu asked, 'why?'

The washerman said, 'Maharaj, the man and his horse were drinking water from the pond. The man was sitting on the horse and drinking water from the pond. This is strange. Then, my wife pointed out that scene and said, 'see how the man on the horse drinks water'. Then I said, 'Heh wife! If I go to some other place, you will also speak the same about me. I will not accept you as my wife.' I have torn her into pieces for her misconduct.'

The king said, 'you have done the best thing'. He started in search of Hatia Hodi on his horse. On the way he found Hatia and killed him. He cut the flesh of Hatia Hodi and came to the palace, offered the meat to the girl and said, 'You cook this meat and eat it. I have already eaten.'

The girl cooked the meat and while eating it found the little finger and Hatia Hodi's ring. She knew that her lover Hatia was no more alive. She did not tell Isalu anything. Both of them did not talk to each other.

One morning, a Yogi came to the palace and saw the girl and said, 'Jai Sriram! I have been moving from one place to the other for such a beautiful girl.'

Raja Isalu heard this and asked the Yogi. But the Yogi said that he had said nothing except *Jai Sriram*. When Isalu asked the Yogi repeatedly, he spoke the truth. Raja Isalu said, 'if you want this girl, I am offering her to you. You can take her.'

The Yogi was very happy. He took the girl along with him and started on his journey. On the way the girl said, 'Hey Yogi! Shall I tell you one thing? If you agree to my condition, I will go with you and become your wife, else I will not go with you.' The Yogi agreed to that girl and said, 'I will do whatever you want.'

The girl took the Yogi to the place where Hatia Hodi's dead body was lying. She said, 'Oh Yogi! I wish that this dead body be cremated. Please bring some firewood.' The Yogi got firewood and the prepared the funeral pyre. He also kept the dead body of Hatia Hodi on the pyre and set the pyre afire. The fire was furious with its flame. The girl said the yogi, 'Hey Yogi! See what is over there in the sky.'

As the Yogi looked at the sky, the girl jumped into the funeral pyre. When the Yogi saw that the girl had jumped in, he also plunged into the fire and burnt himself. Thus the bones of three persons were burnt in one place.

After some days, Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati were going that way. Parvati requested Siva to give back the life of the three people. Siva gave life to these persons. Now the Yogi said, 'the beautiful girl is mine'. Hatia Hodi also said, 'this girl is mine.' Now tell me, who will take the girl?

Ramji Huna Sati

Banjara is a nomadic tribe of the Kalahandi district adjoining eastern Chhatishgarh. They migrated from North-West India. They sing many epic stories which are influenced by the Hindi and Rajsthani oral epics. The most popular epic stories of the Banjara tribe are *Raja Isalu*, *Lakha Banjara*, *Ramji Huna Sati*, *Hiro Diwani*, and *Rama Heru*, *Sirram Naik*. The storyline of these epics is related to their struggle for survival, heroic life, victory over the British, and love and war in the context of their professional occupation. They are known as traders of salt.

Ramji Huna Sati is an epic, which is sung by men and women with utmost devotion. This is a legend associated with the *Sati* system of India.

The story form of the epic is thus.

Huna was a beautiful girl. According to Banjara tradition, her marriage was fixed with Ramji of another village and the negotiations were completed. The rainy season came. Huna waited those four months for her beloved husband to marry her. Her marriage was to be held after the winter season.

Ramji worshipped goddess Meramma during Dasahara. He was to set out for his trade. So he brought the *Ladan-Khadu* etc., to keep on his cart. But he faced many bad omens while loading the cart.

Ramji recognized the bad omens but believed that he could overcome the obstacles. So he set out on the journey with his carts, bullocks and cart men. On the way, his bullock Horia went amiss. Ramji entered into a dense jungle looking for the bullock. Instead of hearing the sounds of his bullock, he heard the roar of a tiger.

The tiger chased Ramji. Ramji had no weapon. So he ran back to the carts and bullocks that he had rested in the jungle. The bullocks and dogs surrounded him. Ramji hid among the animals. But the tiger plunged amidst the animals and took Ramji away and disappeared into the forest. When the tiger attacked him, his brother, sister-in-law, father and mother were also present in the tent. But nobody could save him.

Ramji fought the tiger. But as he was not armed, the tiger tore him to pieces and killed him.

Meanwhile, Huna had a bad dream. The dream was that a tiger was devouring her husband to be in the jungles when he was setting out to trade. Huna woke up and told her mother about the dream. Her mother said, 'Why are you getting worried? Your husband has gone for *Lada Palka*. Don't be silly'. Huna, though anxious about Ramji, remained silent.

In the morning, she went to the Ujjal khed jungle with her friends and collected firewood. They returned to the village and went to fetch water from the river. They dug small wells on the banks of the river and collected water in their pitchers. While Huna was fetching water, a net miraculously appeared in the sand-well that Huna had dug. All of them returned home with their pitchers of water.

Huna also came with her pitcher. She reached home and called her two brothers Jamu and Hira and requested them to place the pitcher down from her head. Everyone in her house was astonished with her uncommon behaviour. They thought that she had been to the Ujjal Khed jungle where some evil spirit must have possessed her. So she was behaving like this. Then her brothers called Ramla Bhagat, the village mendicant-cum-tantric who drove away evil spirits.

When Ramla Bhagat came and touched Huna's hand, his wife died in his house. When he held Huna by her hair, his son died. When he tried to chant the *mantra* to capture the evil sprit, his house got burnt.

Ramla Bhagat then heard that when he had tried to cure Huna, he had lost his wife, son and his house. He immediately came back to Huna and touched her feet. He knew that Huna is a *Sati* (chaste women). The whole world could be burnt if a *Sati* was in danger. Ramla Bhagat fell at Huna's feet and Huna gave back the lives of his wife and son. She also gave back his house. Ramla Bhagat declared Huna to be a *Sati*.

Huna told her mother, 'Oh ma, your son-in-law was caught by the tiger and killed. He is in Khuiria garli (Huna's father-in-law's house). I am going there too'. Saying this she let her hair loose and with a peculiar dress, started to Khuiria garli.

Khuiria garli was Huna's father-in-law's village. On the way, Huna's father-in-law saw her and unable to recognize her asked, 'who is this widow coming with her unfurled hair?'

Huna heard this remark and replied, 'I am the widow of your son Ramji'. She abused her mother-in-law and said, 'I want to stay with my husband. I want to be a *Sati*. I want to go to my husband's world. Arrange for a funeral ceremony for me.' She placed the dead body of her husband on the funeral pyre and set fire to it. Then she begged her mother-in-law for her husband's turban. She got the turban and asked everybody to see the sky. When everybody looked up at the sky, she jumped into the funeral pyre and burnt herself as a *Sati*.

Everybody was looking at the sky to see how Huna and Ramji would fly to heaven. But after some time when they saw the fire, they realized that Huna had burnt herself in her husband's pyre and become a *Sati*.

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Banjara Epic Song

Hiro Diwani

Hiro Diwani was a beautiful girl. She was very active and danced like a deer. Her father said, 'Dear Hiro, why do you dance like a deer? I think one day you will fly away with somebody'.

Hiro replied, 'Oh my father, The goddess fell in love with the god. How did you fall in love with the Nawata of Naujati?' Her father, to save himself from further insult

said, 'I will make gold ornaments for you. I will call the goldsmith from the city and make a nose pin for you'.

Hiro said, 'I don't want your gold nose pin. If you get it for me, I will burn it.' Then she said to her mother, 'Oh mother! The goddess forgot her god. How did you forget the relation with the *khoru barik* of your own race?' Her mother did not know how.

Her mother replied, 'my dear daughter! Keep quiet, I will make *Palna* for you.'

Hiro replied, 'I will burn your *palna*. I don't want it. But I would like to tell him I want.'

Then she said to her brother Fateh Singh, 'Dear brother, how did you forget the washerwoman you love?' Her brother replied, 'Hiro, please don't accuse me, I will bring beautiful clothes for you from the town.' Hiro replied, 'Dear brother, what will I do with clothes you bring me? I don't need them.'

Meanwhile, a sage appeared there. Hiro requested him to get some message from her beloved Ranja. The sage said, 'I have taken a loan neither from you nor your father. So why should I obey you?' Hiro said, 'If you will not listen to me then I will drive you out.' The sage said, 'Hiro Diwani! This is the rainy season. Even the ants and birds don't leave their resting places. How cruel you are to drive me out of your house', to which Diwani replied, 'Oh! Yogi, either you go out, or I will set fire to your cottage.'

Saying thus, she set fire to his cottage. The Yogi said to Diwani, 'Oh Diwani! My cottage has been burnt. My hens have also been burnt. I was getting eggs from my hen. Each egg costs one rupee and twenty-five paise. I have lost it all. Again, my 700 boxes were burnt. The *Pasua* of 2½ *mahan* (measuring weight) were also burnt. My *bender Sikuli* (an ornament which is used while play-acting drama) was saved. Thank God! Lord Rama saved it. But my tobacco pipe was burnt!'

Diwani warned, 'Oh! Yogi! If you go, I will repay you twice or thrice the amount of your loss. But you must go.' The Yogi agreed. He wanted *bhang* (a liquid made of milk and Ganja) from the milk of 12 buffaloes. Again he demanded a buffalo to sit on and travel. He wanted some peanuts from Diwani (On the way, the Yogi would offer peanuts to the boys and ask them the way). Hiro Diwani gave him everything he asked for.

Yogi started his journey. He drank the *Bhang* and on the way, he asked the cowherd-boys the way to Ranja's house. He finally reached Ranja's village. He was tired and so killed a buffalo, burnt its head, and ate it and slept there. He also tied the *Bhuria* buffalo to his leg before he slept.

Meanwhile, the buffaloes of Ranja attacked the Bhuria buffaloes of the Yogi when they saw them. But the Bhuria buffalo could not fight as his leg was tied to the Yogi. While fighting, the sleeping Yogi's leg tagged along with the buffalo. So Bhuria dragged him to the fireplace. There, he got up and saw some buffaloes fighting against his Bhuria. He took a buffalo, cut its head, burnt it in the fire and ate it.

Ranja could see this fight. He wanted to fight with the Yogi who was just like a tantric. But the Yogi brought Diwani's letter. Ranja read the letter and realized that the Yogi had come to handover the message, given by his beloved Hiro.

Ranja wrote back to Hiro Diwani and the Yogi brought the reply to Diwani. It was written in that letter that Ranja would appear during the rainy seasons of *Sravan* or *Bhadrav* (July or August).

Time passed and Ranja came to Diwani during the rainy season. Diwani knew that Ranja had appeared. So she ordered her maidservant to open the window to let fresh air in. The maidservant opened the window and Ranja came in through the window. The maidservant went to Hiro's brother Fateh Singh and reported that Ranja had entered Hiro's bedroom.

Fateh Singh and his wife went to the room and found that Hiro was sitting with her girlfriend. So they went back. Actually Ranja was disguised as a girl. So Fateh Singh could not recognize him.

Ranja came to Hiro everyday and they met at night too.

One day, when Ranja come to Hiro's house, her brother Fateh Singh asked him, 'Who are you, why have you come here?' Ranja replied, 'I am a cowherd-boy. I am poor and I am on the lookout for a job. Can you keep me as your servant?' Fateh Singh engaged him as a servant in his house.

Ranja would go to the jungle to tend cattle. Hiro had prohibited Ranja from going to the southern part of the jungle. But one day Ranja went South and faced a tiger. Ranja fought the tiger and killed it too. He slept there by resting his head on the tiger's head. In the evening when Hiro found that Ranja had not returned, she asked the buffaloes but they could not say anything.

Hiro then called a hen and put it on her bed and said, 'Oh! hen! I am going to look for my Ranja. Unless you call, there will be no morning. She vowed, 'Unless my Ranja returns, there will be no morning.'

Hiro then went to the jungle with a buffalo and found that her beloved Ranja was sleeping and requested him to come home. But Ranja wanted her brother to come and see the kill, so she immediately went back and sent her brother to search for Ranja. Hiro's brother went to the jungle and found that Ranja was sleeping resting his head on the tiger. He understood that Ranja must be a hero.

They both returned with the dead tiger and the Bhuria buffalo. Ranja then said to Fateh Singh, 'I am the childhood husband of your sister.' Fateh Singh then recognized him and conducted the marriage of Hiro and Ranja.

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Interpretation

The epic of *King Isalu* is based on the values of Aryan kings and the classic epics of India such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Some of the characters and events from the two great epics have been reinterpreted in the epic of *Raja Isalu*.

The features of the *Banjara* epic are complex, the sole purpose of which is to glorify chastity of women. Maintaining chastity is an important element of these epics.

The plot and events thus lead to the sacrifice of women for observing monogamy. Marital relation or dedication of a hero to a heroine is not limited to this birth. It is taken to the next birth also. There is a craving for chastity and in the end of the epic the heroine is sacrificed in a funeral pyre. The main character in the epic is a woman and a heroine plays a major role. Although the males recite it, women characters are glorified in the epics. This is related to the myth of a woman and fire. A divine heroine taking birth from the fire is a common element in the Indian epics; sacrifice of humans in the funeral pyre was practised until the twentieth century. Since the epics of Banjara are from the Rajput context of Rajasthan, influences of medieval history of Rajput heroes and heroines are common in the Banjara myth and epics.

The following table indicates the characters and the message conveyed by these epics.

Table: 1

Epic	Heroine	Hero	Animal/ Bird	Helper	Event and Message
King Isalu	King Isalu's foster daughter	Hatia Hodi	Parrot Diamond deer	Sage or yogi as helper	Sacrifice: Chastity in women
Ramji Huna sati	Huna	Ramji	Horia bullock Tiger		Sacrifice: Chastity in women
Hiro Diwani or Hir Ranja	Hir or Hiro	Ranja	Buffalo Tiger	Yogi	Child marriage, Chastity in women

The epics of the Banjara interpreted from the text reveal the complex events and the use of the wit and intelligence of the singer. The singers may have adopted the characters and events from the Banjara legends, and the heroic deeds could be reinterpretations in the light of the characters and events of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Some instances may be examined from the events of the epic of *Raja Isalu*.

The singer begins the story with riddles. The dramatic personae were Raja Isalu (as an unmarried young man who is supposed to die after 12 years), and the Raja Isalu from his early childhood, who became the hero. He won the queens of King Sarkat in a game of riddling.

Thereafter, there was a story competition between King Sarkat and King Isalu in which the former was defeated. Then they played dice and King Isalu defeated the King of Sarkat but he did not take his kingdom. He only wanted the former's daughter.

According to his promise, the King of Sarkat offered King Isalu his daughter and Isalu brought up the girl as his daughter. So Raja Isalu was the foster father. Interestingly Raja Isalu was unmarried. His wish was to give the girl in marriage to a prince of royal lineage. But the girl fell in love with a young Banjara man whom Isalu later killed. Raja

Isalu also offered the girl to a Yogi who wanted to help her. But the girl was dedicated to the young Banjara man only. So the girl ultimately decided not to offer herself to the Yogi and sacrificed herself in the funeral pyre and became a *sati*.

The story of Isalu has some similar motifs which can be identified when compared to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which have been reinterpreted to the cultural context of the Banjara. The key words in the reinterpretation and remoulding of the characters and events of the two great epics are:

1. Person defeated in the game of dice keeps his promise: King Sarkat offered his daughter to King Isalu. King Isalu accepted her as his adopted daughter with a hope that he would marry her off to a prince. (game of dice in the *Mahabharata* in which Draupadi was gambled off)

2. In order to defeat the opponent in the game of dice, the player implemented many mischievous plans. The other player also tries to use his wit to see through the mischief and overcome it. King Isalu used his wit when King Sarkat used a magic cat and lamp near the dice room. King Isalu remembered his magic dice and mouse during the game which he had acquired from his serpent-friend. It is interesting to note how the story of King Isalu getting the magic dice and the mouse is interwoven into the main story in the form of a flashback. So, the epic becomes more interesting. But this sub-story, which is told in favour of King Isalu, is also about a woman (she-serpent) who had an extramarital relationship with another serpent and betrayed her husband. King Isalu disclosed this to his serpent-friend and the latter killed his wife (she-serpent). As a token of friendship, he offered a magical dice and mouse to King Isalu who remembered to use it during the dice game to win.

3. The diamond deer is an important character in the epic. When King Isalu caught him and cut his ear and tail, the deer took revenge on him by introducing his foster-daughter to Hatia Hodi - the hero of the epic. On the other hand, a parrot informed King Isalu that his foster-daughter was in love with a young man named Hatia Hodi. The deer and the parrot were talking animals (both in the *Ramayana* and in *King Isalu* epic).

4. The heroine sacrificed her life in Hatia Hodi's funeral pyre. The Yogi also sacrificed his life after the heroine jumped into the pyre.

The episode is extended by the singer to a puzzle for the audience who listen to the story and answer the puzzle. That puzzle is, after the self-immolation Lord Iswar (Shiva) and Parvati gave back the lives of the three persons. The singer asks the audience to decide who will own the heroine: Hatia Hodi (the hero) or the Yogi who sacrificed his life after the heroine as a gesture of his love.

This really helps the audience to rethink the whole episode and pass a judgment.

Another epic *Ramji-Huna sati* is about the heroine Huna whose marriage was fixed with Ramji, a young man from the nearby village. When Ramji was in the forest, he was

killed by a tiger. Huna, knowing this, wanted to end her life. So she went to the forest and collected the bones of her deceased husband and went to her father-in-law's house to become a *sati.* She arranged the funeral pyre and gave up her life in the pyre. This implies that an unmarried girl engaged to get married is also equal to a married couple in terms of the woman having to maintain chastity. Chastity is not to be practised only in body but also in mind and words.

Hiro Diwani is a popular epic among the Banjara. The name is similar to the north-western epic *Hir-Ranza.* Much literature is available on the *Hir-Ranza* epic. Even a Hindi film Hiro-Ranza was made based on the epic. In this popular story, Hiro and Ranza kill themselves as they were unable to get each other and the story ends in a tragedy.

But in the Banjara epic *Hiro Ranza*, the heroine led a happy life. Hiro's and Ranza's parents had got them married when they were of a tender age. Child marriage was an accepted custom in Hindu society. According to their customs, they may marry each other and live their conjugal life after they attain puberty. The essence of the story is the eagerness and anxiety of the hero and heroine to meet each other and live together. A Yogi (sage) was the mediator between them and they met. Even Ranza served in Hiro's house in the guise of a cowherd-boy so that he could see Hiro everyday.

The episode of Hiro vowing that there would be no dawn until she found Ranja may be compared to sati Anasuya's episode popular in Sanskrit myths in which she vowed that unless her husband was proven alive there would be no dawn and one night became seven nights.

The three epics from the Banjara community are portrayed as specimens of the Banjara culture. Even though they have a 200-year-old history of migration to Kalahandi, they still speak their language and maintain their cultural identity.

Banjara epics are the only epics in which riddles and story competitions take place between kings, and they are found equal in riddling and storytelling. Epic narratives of the Banjara is full of genres such as songs, metaphoric songs depicting hidden meaning of riddles to test the knowledge of the listener, and using additional stories to substantiate and strengthen the main epic story.

Besides, as the Banjara are a heroic community having their own bardic tradition, they migrate with their occupational caste groups (such as barber, singers, musicians, bullock-cart men and washermen) and come across famous forests of many states across Central India; the description of those landscapes are found in the epics.

The birds and animals in the epics play a major role in shaping the epic. In the epic of King Isalu, a diamond deer is the key actor to change the life of the heroine. The wish of King Isalu to offer his foster-daughter in marriage to a prince remained unfulfilled owing to the appearance of the diamond deer. Similarly, the parrot also plays an important role in the epic, which helps the king decide the future of the heroine.

Influence of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* on the Banjara epics is another area of study. The epic-singer moulds the characters and events of the two great epics

by interpolating the Banjara occupational events and characters in such a way that a reflection of the key elements of the great epics are found in it. For instance, some role reversals are explained which is due to the Banjara singers' reproduction from their own cultural context in which they have included the local imagination and universal epic characters and events:

1. The men play dice and use women as an object and gamble; even when defeated they keep their promise which is the symbol of heroism in Indian classic epics.

2. Change in character:

   i. Rama in *Ramayana* was a hero with his role as the husband of Sita, the heroine. In the epic of *King Isalu*, the heroine is the foster-daughter of a king who was supposed to die when he was 12 years old. King Isalu was a foster-father and the heroine was a foster-daughter. It was perhaps due to the bringing up of a foster daughter and remaining unmarried that King Isalu's life did not ended at the age of 12. He lived longer, and the forecast of the astrologer turned out to be false.

   ii. The golden deer of *Ramayana* is changed into a diamond deer in the *Raja Isalu* epic and the purpose of the deer's role was not to harm anybody (Surpanakha, sister of Ravana, was also not intended to harm anybody).

When King Isalu cut off the tail and ear of the diamond deer, the latter planned to take revenge. This has a striking resemblance with the *Ramayana* on the basis of two important actions: cutting of the ear and tail, and the appearance of a deer. When Surpanakha, Ravana's sister was punished, Ravana took revenge on Rama. Similarly, when the harmless deer was insulted, it took revenge on King Isalu by introducing Hatia Hodi (a Banjara hero) to his foster-daughter.

Another episode in the epic of *King Isalu* is that of the washerman and his wife. When riding on the horse, the hero (Hatia Hodi) was able to quench his horse's thirst with the pond water, and the washerman's wife praised the hero because of which the washerman killed her. He also said that he had killed his unchaste wife as she praised another man. The inclusion of the washerman couple in this epic is to validate the fact that woman are not free from infidelity in their mind. By interpolation of characters and events, the singer supports the cause of the epic and strengthens the main character, in terms of maintaining chastity. It may be observed that the characters and events of the *Ramayana* have been in the mental text of the singers and while constructing the epic of *Raja Isalu* the singer has interpolated the character and events in the context of Banjara epic. The diamond deer, parrot, and washer woman, these three characters are important in the life of the heroines (both in *Ramayana* and *Raja Isalu*) to turn their life upside-down.

The Yogi (astrologer/ mendicant/magician, healer) is a mediator between the hero and heroine. In classical epics, the mediator-character helps the hero and heroine in their union and thus, their marriage. Especially Narada, the classical informant in Indian

myths and epics, is found in all the ages (time period of epics) cutting across boundaries of space and time. In the Banjara epic, the Yogi is described as a mendicant who is knowledgeable in tantra, removal of evil spirits and destruction of magic and nullifying witchcraft applied by enemies. But in Banjara's case, the Yogis fail to win over chaste heroines and have invariably surrendered to her. The purpose of such narration is to imply that the Yogi's tantric power and magic are powerless and meaningless before a chaste woman who is faithful to her husband.

The concept of Sati is found in Kalahandi from the beginning of the medieval period. In the fifth century A.D., the Nala Kings worshipped a *sati* stone. Some ponds are known after some women who committed *sati*. The values and morals attached to monogamy and chastity in woman in Indian canons is manifested in the archaeological remains of Kalahandi as well as narrated in the tribal epics like in the Bhunjia epics of *kamala sati* (prototype of Queen Ashavati – mother of Ramai Deo, the Chauhan hero of thirteenth century A.D. in western Orissa).

Deification of human beings, who performed miraculous deeds, after their death is a social and cultural practice among the Indians. Even in rural and tribal areas, people believe in the supernatural and expect miraculous solutions for their problems. For instance, they worship a rain God to get ample rain and harvest.

Because the morals of all these three epics are about chastity in women, a gender disparity is clearly visible in the events and attitude of the characters.

While the other tribal epics of Kalahandi represent the local culture, Banjara epics reflect the greater classical epic tradition of India.

Chapter 10

GAUR ORAL EPIC

Kotrabaina

The Gaurs are a pastoral community and are very powerful warriors. The Gaurs of Kalahandi belong to the Magadha Gaur group. It is unknown as to how the Magadha Gaurs came from Patna (Bihar) to Kalahandi. They are a majority community practising agriculture that is their main source of subsistence.

The Ghogia of Kalahandi sing the Kharatmal song. This is a heroic song in which the younger brother Kharatmal is depicted as the hero. The epic song is sung in the form of a narrative and takes about five to ten hours to complete.

It is interesting to note how an oral epic is performed in a rural context, and needless to say, that was the point of departure to collect the oral epics in Kalahandi. The beginning was like this. It was in 1986, in front of the worship place of Ganesh *puja* in Kapsi at 9 o' clock at night, the villagers sat in the gathering. I asked the audience whether anyone would sing a song. Bhajan Nial, aged about 65 years, spontaneously came forward and said that he was willing. Everyone laughed at him. He began singing the song *kotrabaina*.

The singing of the song was initiated in a dramatic way thus: I respectfully invited Bhajan Nial and offered him a seat on the ground on a *dari* in front of the microphone. We all were sitting on a *dari*. Bhajan Nial worshiped Ganesh, the god of wisdom and knowledge. The day was Ganesh *Chathurthi* – the birthday of Ganesh. On this day, boys and girls worship Ganesh in schools and colleges. Musical performances take place all through the night and thus the people partake in the worship.

During Ganesh *puja*, musical performances are not mandatory. The village is near a block headquarter and some educated people play some music. The programme was organized thus. The singer was identified.

Normally, the singer starts his/her singing after a prayer or invocation to the god and goddess. In an Indian context, a prayer to goddess Mangala, Durga, and Saraswati is very common. Even the *panchadevata* namely Gana (Ganesh), Narayana (Vishnu), Rudra (Siva), Ambika (Durga), and Bhasakra (surya) are invoked in every ritual or epic musical performance. Bhajan Nial started the song dramatically.

Bhajan was aware that the audience was a mixed group of literates and non-literates. The song that he sang belonged to his caste – the Gaur (milkman). The song consisted of 375 lines in a written form. It was a solo and the pace of events in it showed the audience that it was not just a song but one with a story.

Kotrabaina—Ramela

Ri. .. ri ... ri ...ri.. ri . ri . ri..ri..... ri
The morning star began to disappear from the sky
Dawn appeared.
The cock and crow called.
The *Garalia* bird chirped early in the morning.
Ramela (the heroine) woke up from her bed and
Picked up her *jharigadu* and
Went to the Udanti river.
She went to river Udanti,
Washed her hair with soil,
She took a complete bath.
After her bath
She washed her clothes and squeezed them dry
Shook her head to shake the water off her long black hair.
And came back home with a jug of water.
She washed her feet with the jug of water
Entered the house with wet clothes on her body.
She picked up the churning pot for curd.

She washed the churning pot and
Brought a pot of curd and poured
Curd into the churning pot.
She fixed the churning rod by tying it with a rope.
She fixed the rope on to the rod
While she pulled the rope
In the left and right hand simultaneously,
The churning rod did not move.
She was surprised to see it and prayed,

'Oh my gods and goddesses
Why don't you listen to my prayer!
Please loosen the churning rod
Allow it to move.
And don't tease me,
Have pity on me,
I will churn the curd and
I will go to Bendul city to sell it

I will offer a human to the man-eater god
I will sacrifice a goat to the goat-eater goddess
I will offer a sheep to the sheep-eater deities
Oh! gods and goddesses
Just leave the rope of the churning rod
Oh! My Kanabhaira
Mohalachma Devta, Samaleswari
Patmisri, Dhuruabudha, Jharbarla
Chandi Samlai (all clan deities)
Help me! Do not tighten the *rohi dang*,
I am churning the curd.'

Even after Ramela's prayer,
With her earnest request and praises
The gods and goddesses did not let her churn,
They tightened the rod.

Ramela called in her *nanad* Balmati.
She said: 'Why don't you listen
Oh my *nanad* Balmati.'
'Why are you calling me? Oh *Bohu!*'
Asked Balmati.

'O Balmati, O *nani*
Go and call an astrologer, I want to know my future
And to know why the churning rod is not moving.'

Balmati went to the house of an astrologer
The astrologer asked her,
'Oh, Balmati,
What made you come here?
Is there any message?
Is there any problem?'

Balmati replied,
'No uncle *mamu* my *Bohu*
Has called you to her presence.
Come with me.'

The astrologer asked,
'Is anybody suffering from fever?
Or is anybody in your family in danger?'

Balmati said, 'No *mamu*
She only wanted you to come to my house.
Please come with the *Khadi* and *panji*.'

The old man picked up the book and chalk
And putting them under his left arm, he got up from the ground.
And started walking.
Oh, see how the old man is walking
Or is he running?
At some places the old man is running
At some places the old man is keeping sixteen *kulat*
The old man
Arrived at the house of Ramela
Ri. .. ri....ri...ri...ri..ri. ri . ri ..... ri

When the old man (astrologer) reached Ramela's house
She offered him tobacco
She also gave a jug of water.
And a plate of rice.

Ramela said,
'Oh *Baba* (father), please see the astrology
See my horoscope in your palm leaves
And draw the diagram of my planets on the ground.'
The astrologer said,
'Why should I draw the diagram on the ground?
Why should I see the horoscope, oh my daughter?'
Ramela said,
'Oh *Baba*, kindly see my horoscope
Tell me whether my time is good or bad.'

The astrologer sat on the ground
And he drew the obscure lines of astrology,
He counted the planets and
And suddenly he started saying
'Oh my daughter,
You want to go to Bendul city to sell curd
So your clan deities are obstructing you.
They have obstructed you by fixing your churning rod.'
Ramela said,
'Oh my astrologer *baba*
Do not stop me from going to Bendul city
Allow me to sell the curd
I will make a spoonful of gold out of a spoonful of curd
I will make silver out of a spoonful of curd

Let me have the chance to sell curd
At least once or twice.'
Ri... ri........ ri..........ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri ...... ri............

Despite the prohibition of the old astrologer
Ramela did not listen to him.
She was determined to go to Bendul.
So she again came to the churning rod.
She poured a spoonful of water into the pot
'Now why don't you release my churning rod?
Do not fix it, please let the rod work.'
After that, the god or goddess left the rod
They left the *ghani*
(She churned the curd)
She untied the rope
Cleared the butter and ghee after heating it
After pouring them, she took the curd in a pot and
Lifted it onto her head.

She also took a spoon and a bamboo basket
Under her arm. And set out to Bendul city
To sell curd and earn gold.
She said,
'Oh Balmati *Nani*
Please listen to me.
Take care of your jewel-like nephew
Let me go to Bendul city to sell curd
I will come back soon'.
Ri... ri........ ri..........ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri ...... ri.

Leaving her son with Balmati
Ramela was about to start for Bendul city.
Balmati called her behind,
'O Bohu
How can I take care of such a
Milk-suckling child?
I had better feed porridge to the child who needs it
I had better offer milk to the child who likes milk
My uncle, the astrologer, came
He barred you from going to Bendul city

The deities prevented you from going and obstructed you
I also requested you not to go to Bendul city
But you took the vessel of curd.
Listen to me, my brother is not here, please wait until he comes.'
But Ramela would not listen. Leaving the child with Balmati
She left for Bendul city.
She took a small pot of curd and
A bamboo basket and went to Bendul city.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri.

While going to the city
She had to cross a jungle, a deep and dark one.
A jungle without the noise of a single bird or an animal.
A jungle where no sunrays fell on the earth.
When she was in the middle of the thick forest
Appeared deity Mahalachhma (clan goddess),
And obstructed her in the disguise of a tiger.
The tiger (clan god Kanabhaira) gave her way and
Disappeared into the jungle.
On the way to Bendul
Ramela faced a leopard sitting in her way
The leopard was the clan god Mahalachhma
When she was nearing the leopard,
She picked up the spoon-wand
And the leopard gave her way

After she went some yards,
She saw a bear sitting in her way.
She was mother Goddess Khambeswari.
Ramela turned the spoon-wand
And the bear disappeared.
After going further
She found a wild buffalo
Obstructing her way
The clan god Dhuruabudha was
Obstructing her in the form of a buffalo.
The buffalo erecting his horns
Up to ten-handful-measures, was
standing in front of Ramela
When the wild buffalo was just nearing Ramela

She turned the spoon-wand
Against it and the buffalo gave her way and
disappeared into the jungle.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri..

Ramela reached Bendul city
She shouted, 'butter milk for sale,'
'buy curd,'
Some people came with rice
Some people with paddy
And bought curd.
All the villagers were approaching her.
She called the paddy, her gold
And the rice, her silver
She exchanged the buttermilk and the curd,
For rice and paddy.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri..

Ramela, while selling curd
Reached the middle of the city
Two *paiks* were
Marching on the street
They saw the beautiful woman selling curd.
Then they ran to the king
(After falling three times on the way,
After licking dust in their mouth)
They entered the palace sweating and dusty.
They folded their hands and said,
'Maharaj, Maharaj, listen to us, Maharaj!'

The King of Bendul asked,
'What happened to you, soldiers?'
'A beautiful woman has entered our city to sell curd.
Revered Maharaja, you have seven beautiful queens.
But the beautiful lips of your seven queens
Cannot be even compared to that milkmaid's toe.'
Hearing this, the king ordered two more soldiers.
Two other soldiers went to see her.
When they saw the beautiful Ramela

(They had seen her beauty only slightly,
They fell down on the earth and dust entered their mouth.)
They also came to the king and said,
'Oh, Maharaja, it is true that
A beautiful woman has appeared in our city.
She is more beautiful than your queens.'
The king was a debouch. He asked the soldiers,
'What shall we do my soldiers?
Go! And get her to my presence.
Send two wrestlers to bring the woman.'
The soldiers said, 'Maharaj, before the wrestlers go,
Let us assign our people to get the woman tied.'
Hearing this, the village *Chowkidar* was called.
The messengers beat the drum.
In public places and said that the king has called
All his subjects to his presence at the lion's gate.
Thirty-two clan cultivators assembled for the meeting.
The *praja* - free servants and the subjects assembled.
The king walked down the stairs.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri...............

The people said,
'Neither today nor tomorrow
Why Oh Maharaja have you
Called us to your presence?'
The king said,
'Oh my *kul kishan*
A woman has arrived in the city
She is selling curd.
Go! And catch hold of her.'
Hearing the order of the king
One hundred people went out into a street,
Two hundred people into another street,
Three hundred into another, from
All sides they gathered around Ramela - the curd-seller woman
All the people encircled her seven times
And when they were about to touch her
She moved her spoon-wand
She put the spoon inside the curd-water pot
And lo! The spoon became red-hot iron

After that she worshipped the clan deity:
'Why don't you listen, my clan god and goddess!
I will offer sheep to the sheep-eater,
I will offer goat to the goat-eater,
I will offer pigeon to the pigeon-eater,
But I will not allow anybody to touch my body,
Let nobody touch my body,' said Ramela.
She stood up from the ground,
She thought these people had come to arrest her.
Sweat from her arms were flowing like rivulets or streams
When they were about to catch Ramela,
She moved the spoon-wand and
Some people's legs were cut off,
Some people's hands were cut off,
All the soldiers became powerless.
Blood was flowing from their wounds
A river of blood flowed there
And lo! The flow of blood was so much that
Tutu fish were swimming in the current.
The king was watching this from his palace
He thought, neither today nor yesterday
Has a woman devastated all my cultivators and soldiers.
What to do?
The soldiers came to the king and said,
'Maharaj!
The curd-seller woman killed all the cultivators
And the soldiers of our country.
Tell us what shall we do.'
The King said,
'I have two *mallas*
Who eat four *mans* (20 kg) of rice at a time.
Call them here. They don't do anything
Except eating and sleeping.
Call them, let them carry out my order
By imprisoning the woman.'
The wrestlers said,
'Maharaja, the women has killed all our soldiers
And what to speak of us!
She will pick us up and throw us like stones.'
Listening to this
The two-mallas thought.

The first malla asked, 'what shall we do?'
The second one asked, 'what shall we do?'
They thought and thought for twenty-four hours (eight *prahars*)
The second malla said,
'There is a plan to capture her.'
The first one asked, 'what is it? Please tell me the way'
'See, we have *Brahma nag pasha* - serpent noose
And if we use the serpent noose, we can capture the woman.
We cannot touch her hand
Or even her clothes
Then the two *mallas* took the serpent noose
And went to Ramela.
They started chanting the mantras.

Ri... ri...ri...ri................ ri .... ri ...... ri ...... ri ...... ri ....

'Oh *Brahma phas!* o *nagphas!* (serpent noose)
Go and capture the curd-seller woman
Go and capture the legs of the beautiful woman
This is an order of *Nag raja*
Go and capture the woman.'
The serpent with the chanting of the *mantra*
Went to the woman, tied her legs
Tied her hands, and then tied her body in such a way that
It compressed her ribs
The spoon-wand fell from her hand.
The curd vessel was left out there.
The rice and paddy were left there in the bamboo basket.

After tying Ramela,
The *malls* came with her
And arrived at the king of Bendul.
They said, 'Oh king, we have captured the
Beautiful curd-seller woman
Now what shall we do?'
The king said,
'Take her into the stone house without a gate/door
And throw her into it.'
Then they took her to the stone house
And threw her in and closed the house by rolling a stone at its mouth

Ri... ri.........ri.......... ri ....ri........ ri ....ri.......ri...... ri ....

There she was imprisoned.
Here Balmati, with the baby of Ramela,
Did not blink her eyes the whole night.
Then came the morning,
Stars started disappearing from the morning sky.
But Ramela did not return.
The child was crying and crying
Balmati was trying to make the child sleep and
With lullabies:

Jolijolire morbhanja
Jolijoli mui grospila helbhanja
Mui goras piaibinago.

Oh! my nephew
I will feed milk if you like milk
If you like porridge
I will give you porridge
I barred your mother, but she did not listen
She did not listen at all
Oh! What shall I do?'

Ri... ri.........ri.......... ri ....ri........ ri ....ri.......ri...... ri.

Kotrabaina had been to his elder sister's house.
He was sleeping.
When the sleep was bitter with darkness
All the clan gods decided.
Kanabhaira, Mohalachma, Khameswari
Patmisri, Mahalachhma, Jharbarla
Chandi Samlai, and all gods and goddesses
Assembled and thought,
See how Kotrabaina is sleeping
Without knowing anything.
This is the time of his problems.
All the deities entered into him and
Sat on his neck and chest,
While he was in a deep slumber.
When they sat on him
All of a sudden he got up
And started thinking

A bad omen appeared
There must be some unseen danger
He thought. Let the morning appear at once
But the morning did not come.
Then he called his elder sister.

Oh elder sister
'Get up, I am Kotrabaina calling'
'What happened to you *babu*?'
Asked his sister.
'I am leaving now, I presume
Some disaster has befallen my family
I will go just now.'

His sister said,
'Do not go now my babu,
There may be tigers on the way
There may be bears on your way
There may be leopards on the way,
They will eat you, they may harm you
Where will you go in this bitter dark night?'
Then Kotrabaina sat on the cot and
Called all his gods and goddesses to save him from the danger.
When the cock crowed in the morning
Kotrabaina said,
'Oh! Sister now it is morning
Let me go!'
His sister said, 'Yes, now you can go'
Taking a five-hand-long stick in his hand
Kotrabaina reached his home in one breath.
On his way he might have witnessed twelve jungles
(This may be around more than half an hour,
I am not telling the whole narrative, I have no time
I am telling the *thikathika* – the story in a nutshell.)

When he reached home he saw that his
Little child was crying pitiably.
His sister was trying to calm the child.
Kotrabaina asked,
'*Nani*, o *nani* (o sister)
What happened to you?'

Nani Balmati was spellbound.
She was speechless, and she burst into tears.

'Where is your sister-in-law?
Where has she gone? I do not see her.'
Balmati replied, '*dada*
Yesterday she went to Bendul city to sell curd,
Oh! My god, that widow (abusive word)
Ate every thing
(Finished everything), she must be in some danger
Somebody must have abducted her.
She has not returned from the Bendul city.'

He asked his sister for a pot.
He took the pot and went to
Gothbhatha (a place in the jungle – an opening where all cows are kept in cowshed)
In that *Goth*, twelve *Goth* of cowboys had assembled to graze the cattle
Kotrabaina had a million *kadams*
In that huge *Goth*, all calves and buffaloes, cows,
Bulls and bullocks are tied up.
Kotrabaina went there and called them all.
Said, 'Oh my Guneswar cow, oh my bull
Listen to me, come to me.'
When the cattle listened to the call of Kotrabaina,
They all rushed to him.
They were two *kosh* (four miles) away from his call.
Hearing their master's call
Erecting their ears, they came to him.
He took all the calves to the cows, and fed them,
and churned some milk in a pot.
He took the milk home and gave it to Balmati.
Kotrabaina invoked all the clan gods and goddesses
Offered some milk and
Gave the milk to his child
The child sucked the milk (sounds like *sud sud sud*)
When the child's belly was filled with milk
Kotrabaina called his sister Balmati and said,
'Take care of my child
Bring water, cook food, and take care of yourself
Till I come back'

He went to the twelve *Goth* of cowshed
Kotrabaina went to the twelve *Goth* of cows
He saw that someone was cooking rice
Someone was cooking curry
Someone was putting fire on the oven
Kotrabaina called them all
Oh my twelve cowherd-boys
Take food and hurry.
We have to take our twelve hundred cowherds to Bendul city.
The cowboys took their food
And also took some tobacco.
Only God knew whether they have to stay for a day or two, or even more than that
All the cowboys set out for Bendul city.
They called all the cows,
'Oh lo! How the bell is tied to the
Neck of *patnia* buffalo,
The tinkling of the bells creates fear among the enemies
Two buffaloes led the whole twelve hundred cows.
The road was full of dust with their marching.
Of such a cowherds
It looked as if dust has covered the whole sky
Bendul city is in darkness.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri ....

Kotrabaina called
'Oh! My cowboys
Go to the tank, fetch water and water
Our cows and buffaloes
All the cows and bullocks entered the
Huge tank of the city and drank water
The water each cow drank was just a cup
The water in the tank was fully consumed
So the *Balia* and *Seut* fishes came out/ appeared
Owing to lack of water they rolled in the mud.
The cowboys hit the fish with their sticks.
They all caught fish
And they went to another pond
And collected fish.

Kotrabaina said
'Oh my cowboys, you all build a tent in the tree
I will sleep there.'
The boys made a *mancha-tent* on the branches of a tree.
Kotrbaina slept there for quite a along time.
The cowboys wanted to wake him up.
But Kotrabaina did not wake.
Everyone tried to wake him up but in vain
The boys said,
'See, we have twenty-four *Ghana* (measure)
of iron *Sabal* - moitar.
Heat the mortar and when it is hot
Touch Kotrbaina's body with it
Then he will get up.'

They went to the blacksmith
Prepared a twenty-*Ghana* iron dagger
Collected dry cow dung and made fire with it.
They heated the iron rod
It was red hot and
Taking the iron rod, they touched
Kotrabaina's back with it, it was in vain.
He did not get up.
Again they hit his back with the rod and then he got up.
He got up and asked the cowherd-boys
To get a jug of water and a toothbrush-stick.
The cowherd-boys went to the jungle and
Got a huge tamarind tree for Kotrabaina to brush his teeth.
He brushed his teeth with such a huge tree.
And washed his face.

Ri... ri........ ri..........ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri...............

Then he asked,
'What do you see my cowherd-boys
Go and break the lions' gate
Go and destroy the houses.
Get fire wood from them,
Burn all the fish, and come to me.
The cowherd-boys broke the mud/thatched huts
And brought the wood from the houses.
Gathered the wooden particles

And burnt them. They burnt the fish
Kotrabaina ate the big fish.
And left the small fish for the cowboys.
The left-out heap of the fish bone was looking like a mountain.
A mountain of fish bone.
Kotrabaina said,
'What shall we do?
How do we attack Bendul city?'
Meanwhile, the seven queens of Bendul king
Were watching the heroic deeds of Kotrabaina
All of them came to Kotrabaina
And stood before him.
The queens said,
'*Juhar Mohapuru* (Respect to you)
We have done nothing.
The king (our husband) has done this.
He brought your wife and imprisoned her.
He did not like us; we are seven beautiful queens,
But he liked your curd-seller wife.
Please leave us.'
Kotrabaina said
'Oh queens, do not worry,
You have done no sin.
Just tell me where my wife is.'
The seven queens said,
'Your wife is imprisoned in the gateless stone house.'
Kotrabaina ordered his bulls and buffaloes
To attack the stone house
Bharmall bij ar pad (a type of furious buffalo)
Ran back and rushed towards the stone house and stuck with its horn
the gate made of stones.
Then the *kurmel sandh* (bull) struck its head on the stone house.
The stone wall broke into two parts.
The cowherd-boys rescued Ramela.
And took her to the place where they were staying.

Ri... ri........ ri..........ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri...............

Then Kotrabaina asked,
'Oh my cowherd-boys, go to the evil king and
Bring him to my presence.

The cowherd-boys went into the palace and caught hold of him
Kotrabaina thought of sacrificing the evil king.
Before the altar of his clan goddess.
He called the boys to
Get a *mana* (4kgs measure) of rice
A pot of water to wash the rice and bring bael leaf. He got everything
He placed a handful of rice to each God and called them

'Oh god and goddess,
Today I am sacrificing my enemy to appease you
Please accept him.'
He got a palm leaf from the mythical text
and kept in front of the worship place.
He gave the king free breathing.[1]
(Just as a sheep is given a bath and worshipped before it is sacrificed)
He was taken to the sacrificial post
Kotrabaina beheaded him with his sword.
He said 'I kept my promise.
I had to rescue Ramela
I did that
I had to satisfy my god
With the blood of my enemy
I did that.'

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri ....

'Oh my twelve brother cowherd-boys!
Go to Bendul city
Enter the king's palace.
And get twelve beautiful girls.'
They went to the palace and got twelve beautiful girls to marry them,
They all came back to their village after winning the Bendul city.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri ....

Kotrabaina saw that his only child was playing
He said, 'Oh my sister Balmati,
If you do not see any sin in Ramela
You hand over the child to your sister-in-law Ramela,
But, if you see any fault, do not offer the child to her.'
The villagers assembled for a meeting. Kotrabaina ordered,
'Oh my twelve brothers, dig a pit twelve-hands long, deep and

Bring twelve types of wood and burn the wood inside the pit.'
They set the fire.
See, the flame of the fire is touching the sky
The flame of the fire is like the red tongue of the fire god *agni*
People from all clans and castes were assembled
Ramela took her bath.
Ramela wearing her precious clothes
And ornaments in her nail and hair.

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri.

She was called to the fireplace.
Kotrabaina declared
'If you are chaste, the fire can't touch even your hair,
you will be saved from the fire
But if you have become unchaste in the city of Bendul,
Or if the king of Bendul had touched you,
Or if you had thought of anyone else even in your dream,
You will turn into ashes in this fire ordeal.'

Ri... ri........ ri.......... ri.......... ri........ ri ....ri...... ri...... ri.

Ramela stood facing the east
With folded hands worshipped the clan gods,
Oh, she was clothed in a precious dress and
(Ornaments covered up to her nails and hair)
She stood up in front of the fire, and invoked:

'Oh *Dharma Devta*, (sun god)
Oh *Mati Matari*- earth goddess, mother
Oh clan gods,
If I am chaste
Oh fire god - *Agni Deva*
If I am a chaste woman
In my mind and body,
You will save me.
If I am unchaste you will turn me to ashes.'
Saying this
Ramela plunged into the fire pit.
From this end to that end, twelve-hand (eighteen feet) long
From that end to this end, she walked.
No fire touched her clothes or

No fire burnt her feet.
Kotrabaina said,
'Oh my respected elders,
My brothers and kinsmen
Did you see my chaste Ramela?'
The people said, 'we saw it and agree to it.
But we want another test.
The test is that
If the six-month-old child of Ramela
Will crawl down from its cot and
Suck milk from its mother's breasts,
We will know that she is chaste.'
Hearing this, the child, who was sleeping in the cot
Fell down from the cot
Crawled down to its mother
And got to its mother's lap
Sucked milk from her breasts.
Everybody was astonished.
People called her *sati*. Ramela was chaste.
The clansmen took Ramela home
With all regards, Kotrabaina was allowed to
Take Ramela into his house.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

Kharatmal Khatri

Kharatmal is derived from the Sanskrit word *Kshyatriya Maua*. The story form of the epic narrative is as follows:

There was a kingdom. Its name was Goudeswar. The king was Nageswar and his Queen was Kalyani. She was a very kind-hearted woman and was always devoted to the worship of gods and goddesses. She was the incarnation of love, kindness and charity. People called her *Kulenrani*.

But king Nageswar was a different person. He was a brave fighter. He did not worship any gods and goddesses. His clan deities were not worshipped. During *Navanna*, new rice ceremony, or Dasahara (Durga puja), the king neither lit a lamp nor offered rice to the clan deities. King Nageswar was addicted to liquor. When he was drunk, he would not listen to anybody. He harassed his own people. Everyone in the country was afraid of him. But, for the sake of Queen Kulen, they did not tell anything.

In course of time, the enemies of king Nageswar united to fight against him. A heavy war ensued and Nageswar lost the war. The number of cattle decreased and his property was lost. Revenue was lost. The village headmen did not obey him. He lost his wealth and pride.

King Nageswar was wicked. He thought of a plan to attack his neighbouring kingdom Ranipur and plunder their property. He attacked Ranipur. There was a formidable fight for seven days and seven nights. King Nageswar was killed in the battle. Queen Kalyani became a widow. Her husband did not listen to her advice and lost his life at the hands of his enemy and she became helpless.

When Queen Kalyani was pregnant, her husband died. She invoked Goddess Samalai. She invoked, 'O mother, my husband died, how do I save my clan? Save me. You are the only one who can help me.'

After some days, she gave birth to a baby boy. She thought, 'The child was born after my husband's death. So what would the people say?' She buried the newborn child in a heap of cow dung.

Goddesses Samalai thought, 'This woman was invoking me to get a baby boy to perpetuate her clan. I gave her a son. She buried him? The queen is my devotee. She had observed fasts and celebrated Pujas (worships). How can I forget her devotion?' So Goddesses Samalai brought back the child from the heap. She told the queen, 'your son is with me. You rule the kingdom. I will bring up your son. When he grows up, he will reign over the kingdom. No enemy can do him any harm.' Chandi Samlai brought up the queen's son for 24 years. He studied *saastra* (knowledge) and *Sastra* (weaponry). He became a wrestler. The goddess was very fond of him. As he belonged to the warrior Kshatriya clan, he was named as Kshatriya *malla*, locally known as Kharatmal Khatri.

Kharatmal was a warrior. He tamed the furious bull. He was defeating the *Mallas* - wrestlers. He could lift 24 shafts of iron clubs. He could shake a tree with his two hands and fruits would fall down.

After 24 years, Goddess Samalai told Kharatmal, 'Now you will be the king of your kingdom and will get back to your mother. Go with your 12 Gothiali of cows'.

Kharatmal came to his kingdom with his 12 *Goths* of cows. He had his *Kurmel* bull and *Ultia* sheep. Both were fearsome and helpful to Kharatmal. When Kharatmal returned to his kingdom with his cattle, the dust formed from the marching of the cattle covered the sun. The tinkling sounds of the bells hanging from the necks of the cattle were so fierce that people thought some enemies attacked their kingdom.

Kharatmal reached his mother. He introduced himself. The queen was happy to get her beloved son back. The queen said, 'My dear son, your father did not obey me. He did not worship our clan deity. He also did not light a lamp in front of our deity. He was always drunk and left us in disaster. Now you have come back. Now my days of sorrows are over.'

The people of the kingdom knew all this. They knew that the queen had a son and he was brought up by Goddess Samalai. The prince has the signs of a king. The goddess had given him all knowledge and education. The Patmajhi, Umrali, Gounlias, Makaddam, Jani, and Jhankar sat in a meeting and decided to declare prince Kharatmal as king. They tied the *patsadhi*-turban on his head and enthroned him and declared that Kharatmal has become the king of Goudeswar.

The queen was very happy. She knew that Kharatmal had excellent knowledge and administration skills. He took care of poor people. Everyone said, Kharatmal had inherited the qualities of his mother. The goddess also blessed him. He would never be defeated.

Although Kharatmal was a king, he took care of his cattle. He also knew the problems of the cows. He had 12 crores of cows. He even engaged ploughmen to take care of the cattle. Their names are Chulchulia, Bijanangria, Tribena, Jatabena, Lamnaka, Mandbhadua and Dantgijru. All these cowherd-boys were heroes with superhuman strength. Each of them was known for their character. Chulchulia (fickle minded), Bijanangria (a man from Bijayanagara), Tribena (he who has designed his hair with three *beni*), jatabena (whose hair has been *jata*, uncared bundle of hair), Lamnaka (a man with a long nose), Mandbhadua (a man who is addicted to liquor always), and dantgijru (a man whose teeth are outside his mouth).

Champasur was a neighbouring kingdom of Goudeswar. The king of Champasur was a very good man. But his minister Asarlia was wicked. He was aware of the fame of Kharatmal. He thought, if Kharatmal could be defeated, then his king would gain fame. So he instigated the king, 'Oh Majesty, the neighbouring king Kharatmal is very powerful. He is planning to attack us. Before he attacks us, we should attack him. If we could defeat him, his 12 crores of cattle will be our property'. The king agreed to his proposal.

Asarlia immediately arranged his army. They attacked the kingdom of Goudeswar. Kharatmal did not know this. He saw thousands of soldiers rushing towards his kingdom. Kharatmal thought of a plan. He said, 'Take all the cattle of my kingdom to all the ponds. Let them drink the water and empty the pond, so that the enemies will not even get a drop of water in my land.' The seven warriors of Kharatmal woke up. They took the cattle to the ponds and dried it.

When the army of Champasur came to Goudeswar kingdom, they found no water anywhere. How would they cook food? How would they survive without water? They faced difficulties without water. They tried to come back to the kingdom of Kharatmal where they could get water. But on their way back the 12 crores of cattle stopped them. How do they proceed? Again, they returned. While returning, the *Kurmel sandh* (bull) and *Ultia gadra* (sheep) attacked the soldiers and they were wounded. They had to go back to their Champasur kingdom.

All the soldiers returned. But the cattle saw that the harvest in the field, and was tempted to eat. So they entered the fields and started eating. Bijanagria, the guardian cowherd-boy started singing.

I... ri...... ri..... ri..... ri..... re, ri..... ri..... ri..... ri..... re,
Today watch the drama, oh my God, my twelve crores of cows taught the King of Champasur a lesson.
My *Kurmel sandh* (Bull) and *Ultia gadra* (sheep).
My twelve crore cows.

Ate up all the paddy and crops in the field of the King of Champasur
Oh my boy from which country did this cattle come from and
Finish the paddy of last twelve years of saving.
The crops they finished are like the shaven head of a widow.
The King of Champasur was thinking.
The cattle filled their belly
And went back to the Goudeswar kingdom.
That year, the people of Champasur were in shortage of food.
Kharatmal knew that his *Kurmel sandh* (bull)
Can win the world. He was very happy.
I... ri...... ri...... ri..... ri..... re, ri..... ri..... riri..... re,

The minister Asarlia came to his king. He said, 'Oh king, the cattle of Kharatmal killed the soldiers. They also destroyed our crops.

All of them are powerful because of Kharatmal. It is not possible to win Kharatmal by force. We have to win him through tricks. We have to arrest Kharatmal, by some means. Only then can we defeat their soldiers.' The king answered, 'Our soldiers are not as powerful as even his cattle. How do you intend to arrest him? It is like making stairs to heaven.' The minister said, 'Your Majesty, leave it to me. I will get him arrested by some means. Or else I will not be a minister.' The king remained silent, which indicated that he was unable to avoid his minister.

Ri.... ri...... ri..... ri..... re, ri..... ri..... ri..... ri..... re,

Then Asarlia went to the kingdom of Goudeswara. The court was in session. The queen was seated. Her son Kharatmal was sitting on the throne. The courtiers were present. Bijanangria, Tribena and everyone were present there. Asarlia greeted the queen and said, 'Oh Queen, long live your son. He has won fame and name in the whole world. Our king has invited your son to be our guest. I have come to invite him.'

The queen replied, 'Your king attacked our kingdom, though we are your neighbour. What mistake did we do? You did not even think about us. You thought that we were weak. Now why are you so interested in inviting my son as your guest?'

The clever minister of Champasur, Asarlia, replied, 'Oh great queen! Our king has realized his mistake, so he has invited your son Kharatmal in order to develop good relation. If your son does not accept our invitation our king will feel sorry.'

The queen remained silent. She was apprehensive. After all she was a mother. Kharatmal said, 'Oh maa! Your blessings are with me. My clan goddess is with me. Goddess Manikeswari and Goddess Samalai are with me. Nobody can do me any harm. Don't worry.' The queen agreed. Kharatmal thought that king Champasur had invited him as a guest. So he did not feel like taking any weapons. He set out for Champasur kingdom with Minister Asarlia. The latter was praising Kharatmal all through the journey.

Ri... ri..... ri..... ri.... re, ri.... ri.... ri.... ri.... re,

Minister Asarlia came to the kingdom of Champasur with Kharatmal. The king gave a smile and said, 'Kharatmal, you have destroyed my soldiers. Your cattle have destroyed my crops. I will see who can save your life.'

Kharatmal was surprised. He looked at the minister who gave him a crooked smile. Kharatmal now realized that he had done a mistake by agreeing to the invitation of the minister of Champasur. He did not obey his mother. He could not gauge his enemies. So he was caught by them.

King Champasur arrested Kharatmal. He tied the hands and legs of Kharatmal. Minister Asarlia said, 'Oh King! Could we have touched Kharatmal if he had weapons in his hands? This is the only opportunity; we can kill him. We would not kill him with weapon. We will throw him into a closed stone house. There he will die without food and water.'

Kharatmal, out of anger, bit his lips. He said, 'You traitors! You all are beasts. You have conspired to kill me. Now your days are numbered, your pride will perish. You will be punished, if truth and virtue exist, I will witness the victory.'

Minister Asarlia gave a cruel smile and said, 'Dear Kharatmal, your kingdom will be reigned by us after you. Diplomacy matters in a power game.' Kharatmal invoked Chandi Samlai. He prayed, 'O Goddess Maa Chandi Samlai! These devils are trying to end my life. My mother might be in danger. Please save her life. Help me.'

Asarlia minister called his soldiers and built a stone house without doors and windows. Only one hole was left in the house. Kharatmal was standing and his hands and legs were tied with chains.

Next, Asarlia sent a messenger to queen Kulen, mother of Kharatmal, with a message that her son was imprisoned in their kingdom. He would be released if the loss of their kingdom was compensated for.

Queen Kulen, after listening to this, cried and called all her people. She lamented,

'O my *bhaguals*
My twenty-four-year old Kharatmal,
My son is imprisoned in Champasur
My heart is broken into pieces
Oh my *Bhaguals* listen to me
Go to Champasur kingdom
And get back my son
If my goddess Chandi Samlai exists
The enemies cannot bend
Even a hair of my son.'

Listening to the lament of queen Kulen, Tribena, Jatabena and seven warriors played their *Bans* which created the sound of a conch. Hearing the sound, all the 12 Goth cows assembled. The seven warriors sang-

'Come on my *gundiboli, kali kalsi lenja*
Chairimundi, my Bhundi cow,
My *Kurmel* Bull,
My *Ultia Gadra* (sheep)'
Oh my big brother, the sound is reaching from four *kosh* (eight km)

Iri.... ri....... ri...... ri..... ri..... re..................................

Then the seven warriors planned to attack Champasur kingdom. Queen Kulen said, 'the minister Asarlia had invited my son to be a guest in their kingdom. So you catch hold of Asarlia. Only then you will learn the whereabouts of my son. Don't kill the minister unless you get my son.' Then the *Bhaguals* made an iron rod of 24 shafts and put the rod on their shoulders; they then split themselves and went in four directions: five hundred here and seven hundred there; thus they distributed their army.

Iri..... ri...... ri...... ri.... ri...... re.................................
Tribena challenged.
'Today I will teach a lesson to the
King of Champasur.
If I do not break the lower jaw of the
Minister Asarlia, my name is not Tribena'.
They made four groups,
First was *Kurmel* Bull and its group. Then came the *Ultia* sheep,
Next the twelve *goths* herd of cows
And last of all, the soldiers
Led by seven warriors the troop marched towards Champasur.
Oh, my Kurmel Bull is calling
Its sound travels three *kosh* (6 kilometres)
My Ultia sheep is dashing its head
Against the huge trees and lo!
The trees are breaking into pieces.
The soldiers entered Champasur kingdom.
Attacked the capital and their soldiers,
The general and others fled out of fear
Being unable to face the formidable foe.
The seven warriors entered the palace of Champasur.
The king had hid himself in the queen's *Mahal*
Tribena caught hold of him.
The king of Champasur said,
I had no intention to kill Kharatmal.
Minister Asarlia is responsible for all this.
Tribena arrested him and said,
' Being a king you did not honour your guest.

You don't follow the ethics of a king. You did not even know that if a king is unruly, then the subjects of the kingdom suffer. You are arrested. Only Queen Kulen will decide your case.'

Tribena tied up the hands and legs of the king with iron chains.
They searched for Minister Asarlia;
They searched and searched, but could not find him in the palace.
Tribena said, 'Minister Asarlia is a wicked person.
Don't believe him. He can throw dust in everybody's eyes.'
Tribena ordered his soldiers to search all men and women.
Then Tribena and Jatabena searched every room.
Last of all they searched the women's *mahal.*

There they searched the queen, the princess and other women. All women's faces were visible except one who had covered her face with a *saree.* Tribena pulled the cloth covering her head and found the woman who was hiding her face to be a eunuch; it was none other than the wicked minister Asarlia. Tribena gave the minister two blows and the minister said, 'I am not the culprit. I was the person to carry out the orders of the king.' Tribena asked him, 'if you find our King Kharatmal then we will spare your life, or else we will spoil your two eyes.'

The minister took them to the stone house where Kharatmal was imprisoned. It was very difficult to break the stone house. So Tribena called *ultia gadra* and *Kurmel* Bull to break the stone house. Kurmel Bull became furious and hit his head against the stone house. The stone turned into pieces and Kharatmal was rescued. Kharatmal immediately killed the minister and left him there.

Kharatmal brought the king of Champasur as a prisoner to the kingdom of Goudeswar. Queen Kulen saw her son Kharatmal and was so happy that she burst into tears. The durbar of King Kharatmal decided that the king of Champasur be punished with death for his misdeed.

Queen Kulen asked, 'Oh king of Champasur! You have violated the *atithya dharma.* You wanted my kingdom.' The king of Champasur said, 'I have committed a mistake. I am ready to accept any punishment.' The seven warriors said, 'the king should be punished.' Queen Kulen said, 'It was due to the wicked minister that the king was misled. His subjects and his queen have not done us any wrong.' So the king was set free.

The king could not believe it. He said, 'I have a request, I am sorry. I want to see your son Kharatmal as my son-in-law. I want to give my only daughter in marriage to your son.' Only then will I feel that you have forgiven me. The queen agreed to this. The marriage was instituted. The two kingdoms lived happily.

Madhab-Rupmati (Prose Narrative)

The name of the village was Sargiguda. A *gauntia* - village headman belonging to the milkman (Gaur) community had 12 crores of cattle. During the rainy season, his house was filled with mud and cow dung because of the large number of cattle.

One day, the *gauntia* told his sons, 'Dear sons, you take the cattle to Kadli Kachhar (a place near the jungle) which has abundant plantain trees. Make a cowshed and keep all the cattle there. It is impossible to keep them in our house.'

The seven brothers went to Kadli Kachhar. They made a *adar* and kept all the cows there. They also stayed there for four days. They were watching the cattle during the day and came back home at night. One night thieves came to the *adar* and stole some milking cows and some bullocks. The seven brothers came to know of this. The *gauntia* said, 'Watch the cattle at night or else the thieves will take them away.'

The seven brothers went to Kadli Kachhar and stayed in a hut watching for the thieves.

It was midnight and when the seven brothers had slept of fatigue, the thieves came and cut down the throats of seven brothers and took away all the cattle.

In the morning, *Gaunlien* – the mother of seven brothers came to the *adar* to collect milk from the cows, but she found that the cowshed was empty. She went to the hut to see her sons. To her shock, she found that all of her sons had been killed. The hut was full of blood. She cried, 'Oh I lost my world, I lost my family.'

She returned home and told everything to her husband. The old man went there. He saw them and lamented, 'Oh god, why have you left me alive to see this disaster?' He burst into tears.

But he had to survive. His six elder daughters-in-law had no children. He thought of keeping his progeny. He had to make his clan survive through his youngest daughter-in-law who was pregnant. The old man was waiting for his grandson to be born from his youngest daughter-in-law. He worshipped Chandi Samlai and Jharbarla.

She delivered a boy after the end of ten months. In course of time, the child grew up to be a young boy. His grandfather named him Madhab. He played ball with other friends. His friends teased him: 'a son without father is playing the ball.' Madhab was hurt. He did not eat anything. The old *gauntia* (his grandfather) said, 'oh *nati*! Take food'. Madhab said, 'If you will not tell me about my father, I will not eat. How could I be a son without my father? Who is my father? Where is he?'

The old man narrated everything to his grandson. Madhab said, 'please tell me the identification marks of the stolen cattle. I will search for them.' The old man narrated everything to him. Then Madhab wanted the *pat ghoda* – great horse. The old man said, 'unless you worship *pitkhusi,* the magic horse will not appear.' Madhab worshipped Pitkhusi (clan goddess), Chandi Samlai, and Jharbarla and got *pat ghoda,* the great horse. There were seven-hundred bells jingling on the neck of the horse. Madhab set out on his mission.

When the thieves took away the cattle, they left a one-eyed buffalo on the way. Madhab reached there and was able to identify the one-eyed buffalo. He also compared the signs as narrated by his grandfather. He said to the buffalo, 'while coming back. I will take you to my home.'

He went from one village to the other. He reached Mahulpatna region. The horse stopped there. Madhab knew that his cattle was there. He stood under a *Mahua* tree. He worshipped the tree folding his hand and said, 'Oh mother tree, do you consider my honour as yours? Do you consider my victory as your victory?' The tree said, 'Yes, my son, it is my honour.' Madhab said, 'Then help me by giving me shelter in your lap.' Hearing this, the tree grew three-fold. Madhab hid his royal dress inside the tree. He wore a torn cloth. He painted his body as if he were a leper. He started begging in the village of Mahulpatna.

He reached near the place, where the cattle were tied up. The headman of the village had seven sons and a daughter. The name of the daughter was Rupmati. They saw Madhab and asked, 'Who are you? Why have you come here?' Madhab said, 'I am alone, an orphan. I want a job to fill my belly.'

They took pity on him and engaged him to tend the cattle. The headman of the village saw Madhab effectively managing all the important tasks assigned to him. So he wanted to engage him in bride-service. He called his kin and relatives to his house and expressed his desire. Everybody expressed that Madhab was a young man fit to be the son-in-law.

Thereafter, the marriage of Madhab and Rupmati was instituted. But Rupmati was not happy. So she did not wear good dresses or ornaments. Madhab was also a man with scabies and skin diseases. So she was not infatuated by him.

Madhab never stayed at home. He always went to the *adar* near the jungle. A dog was with him. Rupmati was serving left-over food to the dog as well as her husband, Madhab. But he did not take that food; with the grace of the goddess he had won over hunger and thirst. Rupmati was coming to Madhab, but she was ill-treating him.

One day her mother found out that Rupmati was abusing her husband. She said, 'My daughter, you are unable to see your husband. He is a prince with all power, property, knowledge and beauty. Tonight you go there and see who he is.' Rupmati went to the *adar* with her mother and found that a handsome young man was sitting on a horse and the cattle were grazing.

Rupmati's mother showed her Madhab and said, 'Madhab is a miraculous boy, how could anybody else control the twelve crores of cattle?' Rupmati understood her mistake.

The next day when she went to the *adar*, she found her husband in his usual form: a man with skin disease.

Rupmati knew that the real face of Madhab was revealed in the night. He was in disguise during the day. So she cooked delicious food and offered it to him. She also begged forgiveness for her misconduct.

Madhab said, 'Rupmati, you have misbehaved with me. I did not mind. But can you help me?' Rupmati said, 'Yes, I can.'

Madhab asked, 'Can you leave your home and come with me?' Rupmati said, 'yes, I will leave everything for you.'

Madhab got his paddy and its basket. He offered it to the goddess and said, 'oh mother Chandi Samlai, please separate my cattle from my father-in-law's cattle.'

In fact, Madhab's father-in-law was none other than one of the thieves who killed his father.

With the grace of the goddess, the cattle were separated.

At night, Madhab and Rupmati decided to leave their home with the cattle they had identified as Madhab's.

They started and went on. On the way there came a river, full of water. Madhab managed to cross the river with the horse. They went on.

Then they came across a kingdom. People saw that a man was taking a beautiful woman with such a wealth of cattle. They reported it to the king. The soldiers of the king fought with Madhab and they were defeated.

Similarly, Madhab came across three kingdoms and won over the king's soldiers. On his way back, Madhab reached near the one-eyed buffalo. Rupmati wanted to know about it, but Madhab prevented her from asking any questions.

The one-eyed buffalo and other cattle reached Kadli Kachhar. Madhab found seven cots, dried blood, and seven skeletons in the hut. Madhab burst into tears, imagining that he could get back the cattle for which his uncles and father were killed. Everybody was crying Madhab said, 'I am unfortunate. I lost my father when I was in my mother's womb; I also lost all my uncles. I got back my cattle. Who would see it?'

Iswar Mahaprabhu was listening to Madhab's lament. He could not tolerate the grief of Madhab and said, 'Oh boy, why are you crying? I am listening to your cry for the past seven days and nights. What is the reason?'

Madhab said, 'Mahaprabhu, one wish remains unfulfilled in my life. My ancestors could not see my achievement. I saw their skeletons and was weeping.'

Mahaprabhu took Madhab to the hut where the skeletons were lying. He drew some water from his *kamandalu*. He chanted the *sanjibani mantra* (life-giving chant) and sprinkled the water on the skeletons. All of them got their life back and not understanding anything they started running here and there. Madhab called them and explained all that had happened. Everybody recognized Madhab. He also got back his father and uncles.

But they were unable to believe. After this, when Madhab took them all to his grandfather *gauntia*, they believed it. Everybody lived happily.

Bhujbal Khena (Brief Prose Narrative)

There was a rich widow in a Gaur village. Her husband died and left her with two sons. The elder was Digbal and the younger was Bhujbal. Digbal was married to Sunadi .But he was always addicted to liquor.

Analysis of Gaur Epic: Bansgeet

Bansgeet comprises of 12 *khena*-cycles. Locally, it is known as *Barakhena Bansgeet* (literally 12 species of *Bansgeet*). Each species signifies the heroic deeds of the Gaur heroes. Thus in 12 species, the superhuman and miraculous deeds of Gaur heroes are described. These 12 species of *Bansgeet* depict the heroic deeds of the 12 brothers of the Gaur king Nageswar and Queen Urmila of Goudesvara kingdom. The 12 heroes, the sons of king Nageswar, are: Bhujbal, Caibal, Durbal, Chaibal, Kharatmal, Sankharat, Badkharat, Madhab, Rupadhar, Kotrabaina, Birbal, and Sunadha.

These 12 brothers are 12 princes; each one is the embodiment of some heroic and supernatural force. Each cycle has been arranged according to the names of the heroes and heroines such as Rupadhar-Hirandri, Kotrabaina-Ramela and Sunadhar-Nilandri. Each cycle, when sung, takes about five to six hours. The epic singer initiates the epic with *Mangalacharana;* worship of universal gods and goddesses, clan deities, *Panchadeva,* and Saraswati are invoked. He prays to Goddess Saraswati to bless and enable him to sing the song from memory. He also worships Ganesh, the *Vighnaraja*, to start and finish the song without any obstacles. Next, the village deities and clan deities are invoked. The village goddess is also worshipped.

The Gaur epic is heroic in character. The purpose of the performance was to sensitize the newly married couple with the past heroes' and heroines' glorious life. Another objective was to propitiate the clan gods and goddesses for their family and clan group as a whole to prosper. *Kharatmal Veer* is a heroic epic representing their caste identity and ethnic solidarity. The hero type of Gaur (a milkman and farmer community) is put into images in the heroic actions of Kharatmal.

Another epic called *Kotrabaina-Ramela* is different from the above two epics. In this epic, the hero saved the life of his wife from a wicked king, who had imprisoned her.

The epic story is analysed from the cultural context and epic performance performed in the locality. This indicates the mental text of the singer that is influenced by the local (visual) environment and the creation of a text becomes meaningful in the cultural context.

I. Kotrabaina-Ramela From Content to Context

The name of the present folk epic is *Kotrabaina-Ramela,* the names of the hero and heroine. The story of this epic is as follows.

The ethnic culture of the Gaur caste is reflected in the epic *Kotrabaina-Ramela*. The tending of animals and cultivation are the prime occupations of the peasant society. It is a community-based profession. The peasant societies with their occupation of tending domestic animals with agricultural products were always in need of intense security of their property, life, and women. They are always under threat because they had paddy as property. Thieves used to steal them. The revenue officers exploited them. Royal forces always threatened them. In this background, where the theory of 'might is right' was in vogue, the powerful men were exploiting the weaker communities and subduing

them by force. The exploitations and the enjoyment of the rural products by the urban people is the basis for economic disparity in Indian society. Thus, a social disparity has been continuing and is still in existence in our society. Even in Bansgeet, the kidnapping of milk-cows by the royal forces from the Gaur community is depicted. Likewise, kidnapping other's property and women as was in vogue in the primitive societies where the defeated was to withdraw or submit himself to the winner. Thus the repressed feelings and the complexes of the Gaur community explode against the unrighteous monarchy and they finally save themselves from their identity crisis. In reality, it may not be possible to vanquish the royal force, but in imagination to fulfil the cultural loss and to keep their group identity and unity, the Gaur community has fought the king and defeated him.

Now, if we decode the whole content into some functions and generalize them, it would seem that this story is nothing but a parochialized version of the *Ramayana*. The episodes of the abduction of Sita and her fire ordeal have been followed in this epic. Here the parochialization of universal characters of the *Ramayana* in the setting of a caste culture has been made according to its adaptability. Furthermore, it may be said that the functions of the content are constant with variable characters, in both, the epics of *Ramayana* and *Kotrabaina-Ramela*. Indian epic tradition has been deeply structured in the local oral epics. This is the cycle of sharing the common cultural system irrespective of oral and written. A comparative study will show how the greater Indian tradition has been deeply structured in the local folk epics.

Sl. No.	Ramayana	Key	Kotrabaina-Ramela
1	Rama had warned Sita against asking for strange things in the jungle.	Interdiction of hero to heroine.	Kotrabaina has asked Ramela to not proceed to Bendul city.
2	Sita wanted the skin of the golden deer.	Desire of the heroine (gold).	Ramela wanted to buy gold and silver by selling curd.
3	Rama, to run behind the deer, left his hut.	Absence of hero.	Hero was absent as he was in his brother-in-law's house.
4	Lakshmana watching over Sita.	Watching over the heroine.	Balmati, hero's sister, was watching over Ramela.
5	Lakshmana obstructed Sita by drawing three lines and asking Sita not to cross it.	Obstruction.	The astrologer, Balmati, and the clan Gods obstructed Ramela when she wanted to go to the city.
6	Sita crossed the three lines.	Violation.	Ramela went to Bendul to sell curd.
7	Sita was abducted by Ravan and taken captive.	Abduction of heroine by villain.	Ramela was abducted by the king of Bendul and imprisoned.
8	Rama found Sita missing from the hut.	Hero finds heroine missing.	Hero (Kotrabaina) finds Ramela missing from the house.
9	Rama came to know about Sita through Jatayu.	Hero being informed about the heroine.	Hero came to know about Ramela from the clan gods and his sister.
10	Rama planned his attack on Lanka.	Strategizing to regain heroine.	Hero planned to attack bendul city.
11	Rama took help of wild monkeys and bears.	Help from animals.	Kotrabaina took help from domestic animals: bull, cow, and sheep.
12	Rama attacked Lanka.	Battle	Hero attacked Bendul.
13	The monkeys and bears destroyed Lanka.	Destruction by non-human characters.	Bulls and buffaloes destroyed Bendul.
14	Rama killed Ravan and rescued Sita.	Destruction of enemy.	Hero killed the king and rescued Ramela.
15	Sita was suspected by the people of Ayodhya.	Suspicion.	Gaur society suspected Ramela.
16	Sita was subjected to the fire ordeal.	Test.	Ramela was subjected to the fire ordeal.
17	Sita went to Patala.	No commonality.	Ramela gave a test of her local tradition.

From the above comparison, it is evident that the *Ramayana* tradition has been deeply structured in the folk epic. Not only this, the regional cultural tradition, that is distinct from the great Indian tradition, has influenced the local tradition as well.

The binding of Rama and Lakshmana by the serpent-noose has been imitated in the binding of Ramela by *Nagaphasa*. Kotrabaina has been characterized after Kumbhakarna. The hero's sound sleep and branding of 12 shafts (*Ghana*) of hot iron on his two ears to wake him up have been influenced by the Kumbhakarna episode of *Ramayana*. Influence of Oriya *Mahabharata* by Sarala Das is also found in this folk epic. Flowing of a river of blood in the war of Kurukshetra and Duryodhana's swimming in it has been locally adopted in folk imagination. The local tradition of small fishes swimming in the blood river is noticeable. Similarly, another myth of sage Agastya's swallowing all the sea water by taking it in his two palms to quench his thirst, has influenced this epic. Drying of the water of Bendul city by the animal forces is the influence of the above episode. Like the Bakasura of Sarala Mahabharata, Kotrabaina brushed his teeth with a huge stump of a tamarind tree. He also swallowed all the fish and left a mountain of fish bones. All these descriptions reveal the influence of regional *Mahabharata* and the universal Hindu mythology with which the folk have associated their native imagination and their cultural heroes according to their similar traits of assimilation.

Besides the 'Indian tradition' and 'regional tradition', the influence of 'local tradition' in the folk epic may be analysed as follows:

First of all, the Gaur community was a sect of cowherds, and then they transformed into a peasant community. Now they are tending domestic animals and selling milk and curd.

One of the important religious beliefs of the Gaur community is their ancestor worship. A strong belief present among them is that, if they encounter some unforeseen danger, their ancestor sprits along with their clan gods and goddesses predict the danger through some omen, dream, etc. This is a universal belief. Even if someone tries to commit some misdeed, knowingly or unknowingly, the clan gods and goddesses prevent them. They always remain unseen. But sometimes they appear in the form of man or animal to save them from dangers.

Bansgeet is sung to honour the glorious life and works of ancestors along with the worship of their clan gods and goddesses. The people of the Gaur community believe that they would be put to some difficulties if they do not worship them properly. In most of the epic cycles of *Bansgeet*, the characters and the events are mostly related to their clan gods and goddesses. In one epic, the clan god, being annoyed with the hero turns him insane for 12 years. The hero is put to many intense difficulties by the gods to test his devotion towards them. Only the heroine and other characters of the folk epic have been guided by some supernatural powers. Sometimes they have been shown as superhuman beings through their miraculous deeds.

In the present folk epic *Kotrabaina-Ramela*, both the hero and the heroine have been picturized as superhuman beings. When Ramela started to churn the curd in the churning pot, the churning stick and the rope did not move. The clan gods and goddesses obstructed the churning, which was an inauspicious omen. They had known her intention of churning the curd. So they knew that taking the opportunity of her

husband's absence, she was going to Bendul to sell milk and curd. They knew that the devil-king in the city of Bendul would catch her. Therefore, on her way to Bendul they obstructed her thrice taking the forms of a tiger, a wild buffalo, and a bear.

When the king's soldiers caught Ramela, the clan God informed the hero of it in a dream. The hero after fighting a battle defeated the devil-king and sacrificed him to his clan god. The propitiation of gods and goddesses with an offering of human blood is the influence of the tribal Kondh ritual *Meriah*.

While studying the content, it is necessary to understand the local imagination and its aptness. 'One reason for collecting context is that', writes Dundes,[2] 'Only if such date is provided can any serious attempt be made to explain why a particular text is used in a particular situation'. The contextual study of content discovers the particular application of the subject. The local rites and rituals of the particular deities have influenced the folk epic and have been associated with its local myths and legends. A legend runs with a goddess named Belarani (spoon-queen), who was born from the river Udanti. This goddess is worshipped in the villages that are situated on the two sides of the river Udanti. Here runs a legend that, once when the *Satbaheni Jal Kamini* (seven sisters of water-fairy) dried the overflowing water of river, Udanti threw a magical spoon into it. In the place where the spoon fell, there emerged a water fountain, which was known as *Jharia*. The local people discovered this spoon and considering it the implement of water fairies, they worshipped it as Goddess Belarani. Thus the goddess is symbolically represented by a spoon and is known as Belarani. Worship of the goddess represented on stones, weapons, and in some metal implements is a common phenomenon of the Indian religious system. Belarani is worshipped, animated in the spoon, in the villages of Kapsi, Chatiaguda, and Jogenpadar and nearby villages of the river Udanti. This spoon has wonderful magical powers. The association of gods and goddesses in some occupational implement to increase prosperity of the community is a strong belief. In this oral epic, Ramela used a spoon to defeat the soldiers. She succeeded in overcoming the obstacles that came her way with the help of the clan gods and goddesses. The imagination of the magical spoon is an influence of the local deities worshipped in the area from where this folk epic is collected. Ramela, possessing the spoon, overcame all the difficulties. The clan gods and goddesses are in no way superior to the tutelary deities of the locality. It is evident from the epic in which the tiger, bear, and wild buffalo were subdued with the magical spoon.

The local customs of receiving a guest in a house is portrayed in this narrative. The guest is welcomed with a jug of water and then a Kendu leaf with tobacco. It is the sign of hospitality. Another custom is that in this locality, people take a vow before the god that if their ambitions are fulfilled then they will sacrifice cocks, hens, sheep, etc. for him/her. These have been narrated in the epic.

Imitating the fire ordeal of Sita in Ramayana, the Gaur community narrates of a test of Ramela where she came out successful. The second test is that of a tradition. Ramela said that if she were chaste during her imprisonment in Bendul, then her six-month-old child

would crawl down from its cot and suck milk from her breasts. In this test too she came out successful. The people were pleased with the chaste character of Ramela. The second test is a native imagination supported by the folk belief. In this locality it is found that when the milkmaids of the Gaur community return from selling milk and curd and arrive at their house, they wash their feet and hands. Then they press their two breasts with their hands and discharge some milk on the earth. Only then they feed their children with their breast milk. By doing this they believe that the effects of evil eyes on them would be warded off. This is only due to the fact that they do not use blouses on their body while going to sell milk. They do not care to cover their breasts with clothes. To get rid of the effects of the evil eyes of the king, Ramela performed this test. The child is sinless, holy like God. If Ramela had not have been chaste then the child would not have received milk from her breast. Thus, to prove her chastity Ramela underwent the second test. Crawling of the child from the cot is a poetic exaggeration.

The number 12 is a master motif in Central India. Wills[3] has rightly observed this number in the formation of social structure, administrative setup, and also in the ideology and has remarked that this is an ideal model in the culture of Central India. Sinha has also observed this ideal model in the territorial administrative system of Central India (Sinha 1962).[4] Haimendorf,[5] studying the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh, has found the same motif in their origin myth. In the division of clans and deities, the number 12 has played a significant role. The imagination of *Barabhai* Bhima (12 brothers of Bhima: rain Gods), 12 brothers of Binjhals and Kumhar, etc., are seen in this region. In *Bansgeet* the influence of the number 12 has been found in some places. The 12 crores of cows, 12 beautiful girls, 12 cowherd-boys, 12 *Ghanas* of hot iron, etc., show the influence of the cultural trait of Central India.

The basic characteristics of the epic are the supernatural and miraculous events interwoven with the normal characters. The exaggerations and uncommon wit of the epic (10) transform an ordinary man into a glorious hero. Kinsley says, 'One could like epics songs manipulated by bards to make heroes out of ordinary man' (Kinsley 1987:97-98).[6] In reality, the bard assimilates the colour of imaginations and makes the epic heartrending. The present folk epic is nothing but the real life history of Gaur community.

The sense of group identity and ethnocentrism within the Gaur community has created a hero and a heroine with superhuman power. In reality, it may not be possible for the Gaur community of a village to defeat the royal forces. But the ideal victory of righteousness and defeat of sin has been put into the images of this epic characters and events. Finally, it may be said that the suppressed desire of the Gaur community has found expression in this folk epic, where the ordinary village milkman has been able to take revenge against his enemy, the king of Bendul. By this, they have kept their ethnic culture bound with the greater Indian culture, feeling one among all, keeping their group identity and cultural integrity intact.

2. Kharatmal Khatri: Purpose of the epic

Perpetuating the clan lineage through worship of the clan goddess is the purpose of Kharatmal epic. Therefore, the singer sings the epic story to the newly-wed couple before entering the groom's house.

a. Hero with divine power

The birth of Kharatmal took place after his father died. The hero's mother hides the new-born child in a heap of cow dung. The clan goddess brought up the hero for 24 years and saved queen Kulen from public blame (of giving birth to a hero after his father's death). Here, the clan goddess is also a part of the epic who had a conversation with the queen. The hero is equipped with occupational knowledge. He becomes powerful with the bull and the sheep. The Gaur hero is strong but innocent, simple, and god fearing. The hero in the epic is shown to be brave, truthful, non-diplomatic, and clean hearted as opposed to the treacherous, deceitful, diplomatic minister of the enemy. When a king is deceased, the village headman takes the responsibility and becomes loyal to the throne. Until the minor prince becomes a major and takes over the throne, the village headman supports the queen. Till that period, the kingdom was only ruled by a group of village headmen guided by the queen. All the village headmen and village priests normally selected the king. It was only during the British period that the state with a minor king was seized through the 'sunset law' and the state was directly ruled over by the British colonists.

b. Villain

When the wicked minister of the neighbouring kingdom invited the hero to their capital, the latter agreed and was ultimately imprisoned by the enemy king.

In the epic of *Kharatmal*, two opposite characters are portrayed. The hero's mother and his soldiers were strong, powerful and righteous as opposed to the enemy of the hero who is an idle king supported by a wicked minister.

The hero's mother Kulen (Kalyani was locally known as Kulen) is an embodiment of non-violence, having a kind heart, non-colonial and judicious. She has been portrayed both as a mother and a just queen.

When Kharatmal was in prison, his cowherd-boys and cattle, and sheep attacked the enemy king and rescued Kharatmal. The king was brought to the court of Kharatmal, and the punishment given to him was freedom. The non-violence and generosity shown by the queen towards her son's enemy were exemplary.

The ashamed king offered his only daughter to Kharatmal in marriage. The epic indicates the revival of lost glory of the hero. Here the king is a non-believer in God, whereas the queen is an *astika* - believer of righteousness.

The purpose of the epic is to follow the caste tradition and family custom of lighting a lamp to the clan god, and offering rice to the deity during *Navanna* (new-rice

ceremony). Violation of customs and religious tradition results in degeneration of the family, whereas self devotion to the god or goddess results in prosperity.

The epic is multigeneric. The singer composes the narration according to the need of the character and uses eulogy, praise, lamentation, cry, dialogues, proverbs, prayers, etc. to make the epic lively. The monologue and the poetic commentary of the epic situation by the singer also help the audience to understand the epic more intensively.

3. Madhab-Rupmati:

The epic of Madhab-Rupmati also belongs to the regaining of paternal property and taking revenge on the parents' enemies. Bringing back the lives of the parents by the hero is the basic objective of the epic.

The epic covers three generations. The bandits killed the old Gaur headman's seven sons. The only pregnant younger daughter-in-law begot a child who became the hero-Madhab.

This epic is about the disaster that befalls a family when the old father had to tolerate the sad killing of his seven sons, and to bear the cries of his seven daughters-in-law. The anxiety for perpetuating the clan lineage with the new-born child of the youngest daughter-in-law is tragically narrated by the singer.

The only grandson, the hero Madhab, knows of his father's death and taking the help of his grandfather and the clan goddess starts searching for the cattle stolen by the bandits. The motif of hero in disguise is repeated in the epic. Madhab married Rupmati and came to know that Rupmati's father had stolen his father's cattle. He managed to take the cattle back and with the mercy of Mahaprabhu Iswar and Parvati got back the life of his father and uncles thus regaining the lost lives and property.

This epic also bears the same objective as that of the *Kharatmal* epic. The whole epic is dedicated to the restoration of parental life and property, worshipping the clan goddess and hope for security of life to perpetuate the family tree and to gain glory. The hero had to face many struggles and tests and he eventually overcame it.

Based on the oral epics available among the Gaurs of Kalahandi it is revealed that the singers of the Gaur community identify their caste glory with that of the values and morals expounded in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Observing the commonalities of cultural performance of both urban and rural Indian tradition, Milton Singer wrote, 'perhaps the most striking aspect of the community in culture between village and the city is the common stock of mythological and legendary themes shared by both the villagers and city men.'[7] Therefore the structure of the episode of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are reinterpreted in the local imagination of the singers. Another aspect of the singer is using the musical instrument that signifies that they relate the identification of musical instruments with the gods and goddesses of Hindu mythology. The singers claim that the musical instruments are the symbol of gods and goddesses which is equally important to be worshipped.

The epic of *Kotrabaina-Ramela* is the reinterpretation of the Ramayana, whereas Kharatmal is a story of regaining lost power by the hero of the epic. The key motif of the epic of Kharatmal was to establish the heroic actions of Kharatmal as the ideal model in the Gaur community to generate caste glory as well as to inspire the future generations to follow the morals and values that is created by the seniors for their religion, moral and ethics, economic prosperity, progeny and salvation (*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*). According to Srinivas, 'the Indian sub continent is in a broad sense, one culture area, and over the centuries , ideas, institutions, and artifacts have frequently moved from one part of the country to another, undergoing modifications at every step.' He also added 'the study of a village or a small town or caste provides a strategic point of entry for the study of Indian society and culture as a whole.'[8]

Caste Glory

The Gaur village is imagined as the kingdom and two villages are imagined as two kingdoms. This is the creation of the singer who creates illusions in the minds of the listeners. The community believes it to be true and feel proud of their ancestor hero.

Krishna is their cultural and religious hero. Even the story of two brothers which was an episode of their struggle of migration and survival against their maternal uncle's conspiracy was not recited by the singer since he was moved and could not sing the song. But the framework of the story was again captured, that was nothing but the myth of two brothers Krishna and Balarama and his enemy Kamsa as their maternal uncle. The singer burst into tears while singing and after that he did not sing the story saying he was moved by how the two heroes of his caste had struggled for their caste. It was not justifiable to request the singer to sing the episode again.

The epic of the Gaur caste is a part of the epic of the Indian pastoral community as well as the greater agricultural community who have been in coexistence with the forest people and have shared the culture. The message of their epic story is to struggle and survive, respect the clan gods, and perpetuate the progeny. Here it may be inferred that Kalahandi has traditionally had a high child mortality rate due to lack of medicinal facilities and rural women were facing death. So they were giving birth to many children with a hope that at least some out of many children would survive and perpetuate the progeny. The epic song reveals the kind of struggle that the queen Kulen has undergone to see her child alive. Unless there is a blessing of the supernatural, it was even unimaginable to save lives. Thus the songs of the Gaur singers had the power to energize the Gaur community to survive with a hope of life eternal.

Notes and References

[1] This is a phrase used for giving freedom before killing.

[2] Dundes, Alan, (1978) *Essays in Folkloristics*, Folklore Institute, Meerut: Pp.28-29.

[3] Wills, C.U., (1919) The Territorial System of the Rajput Kingdom's of Mediaveal Chhatisgarh, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XV, No. 5.

[4] Mahendra Kumar Mishra (1962) *Kotrabaina:* A folk hero of Kalahandi folk epics of Western Orissa.

[5] Haimendorf Cristoph Von Furer, (1989) *Gonds of Andhra Pradesh,* Vikash Publishing House, New Delhi.

[6] Ude, Kinsley, A. The Bellows of Heroic Action, *Folklore,* Vol.28. No.5, Calcutta: p–97.

[7] Singer, Milton, (1972) *When a Great Tradition Modernises:An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization,* Piager, New York: Pp.71-75.

[8] Srinivas, M.N., (1985) *Social Change in Modern India,* Orient Longman: p–158.

11

Debgunia Epic

Creation Myth: Janamkhena Puran (Debgunia)

(The *Vrambanda Puran* or *Janamkhand Puran* (same as *Janamkhena puran)* is a semi-literary epic written by the poet Sri Paramananda Debguru. Sri Debguru belongs to the Debgunia caste. This epic is known as *Lakshmi Janam Puran* in Kalahandi adjoining Bolangir district. The Puran is available as palm-leaf manuscript among the Debgunias.

The Purana is performed during the following occasions.

1. During *Margasira* (January)

The five thursdays in the month of *Margasira* are allotted to the worship of Goddess Lakshmi. Debgunia move from door-to-door singing the song of Lakshmi *Janma* (birth of Goddess Lakshmi).

2. During Buffalo Sacrifice

The Kondh tribe observes buffalo sacrifice and during the seven day ceremony, a full night and a day are dedicated to the ritual performance of recitation of *Janam Khand Puran*. The Gova Jani invokes the same myth in Kondhan language. This is known as *Gova Utra* (see chapter 6 on Kondh Oral Epics).

3. When Sowing the First Seed in the Sacred Day of *Akshaya Trutiya* (May)

During *Akhshaya Trutiya*, which is an auspicious day to initiating the sowing of the first paddy in the field in the month of May, the Lakshmi Janam Puran is recited in a ritual in the village temple. The Debgunia performs Puja and then performs the individual singing.

(It is found that the creation myth of Lakshmi is widespread all over Kalahandi in ritual context as well as on other social occasions.)

Janam khand Puran: Lakshmi Janam

The myth of the birth of Goddess Lakshmi runs as follows:

There was a deluge in the earth. *Nidavishnu*, the formless God, was sleeping on a banyan leaf floating in the ocean. After hundred *Kalpa* (eighty-four years), he woke

up. Out of his ear dirt, a demon, Madhu Kaitabha, took birth. (He wanted to kill Brahma).

Nirakar-Nidavishnu meditated for a hundred *Kalpa*. Then, from the soundless domain a sound emerged. *Chhaya* and *Maya* were in the sky. She was *Adimata* or Mahamayee – first mother goddess.

Finding that he (Brahma) was in danger, Brahma invoked *Adimata* (prime mother). *Nirakar* knew this and he released water from his body. He wanted to place the 'water' in the body of *Adinari* (first woman). But he found that *Adimata* had no procreative organ. *Nirakar* tore between the two thighs of *Adimata* and created the procreative organ. Then, he left his water in three lines in her womb. So, three sons were born to Adimata: Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar.

Madhu Kaitabha wanted to kill Brahma. So, *Nirakar* asked Mahamayee to kill the demon. But the demon swallowed the goddess. Then goddess tore his belly and came out of the demon. Then *Nirakar* divided the parts of the demon's dead body and threw them in all four directions. The earth, river, mountain, trees, and creepers were created from the bones, flesh, veins, and blood of the demon, respectively.

The earth was stabled in the deluge. *Nirakar* wanted to create the universe.

The three Gods had no women to marry. Jog Maya or *Adimata* split herself into three forms. They were Savitri, Mahalakshmi, and Parvati. *Nirakar* wanted to create human beings. *Adimata* had sexual intercourse with her son Siva. *Nirakar* knew this and cursed her to take birth on earth as a *Gomata*. *Adimata* became Mahamayee in heaven, cow on earth, and as *Adimata* in the nether region. *Nirakar* (Anadi) uttered: 'Let millions of women emerge out from one woman. Only then will the world be full of mankind.'

Hearing this, Adya became two women. She kept her own self in the nether region and appeared as an illusion (*Mahamaya*) before Anadi (*Nirakar*).

Gomata was identified as Kapila in the earth. Vishnu took his incarnation from Kapila in the form of a calf. *Gomata* was happy on seeing the tender calf she had borne. *Adi Niranjan* (supreme God) thought of creating both *Deva* (God) and *Danava* (demon).

Gomata gave birth to a buffalo from her left over (excreta during delivery). *Adi Niranjan* was happy to see the tender calf and the buffalo. *Adimata* brought up the calf and the buffalo and fed them with milk.

Everyday *Gomata* got milk from the milk sea, which was unknown to others. One day, the calf went to the milk sea and drank the milk and the sea dried. Brahma asked the *Surya* to report the truth. Brahma and Vishnu went to Siva and said that the calf had drunk all the milk sea. Siva, on hearing this, wanted to kill the calf with his trident. Vishnu saved the calf which was hiding in his *Chakra* -weapon.

Siva killed the calf and he was alleged with the sin of killing a calf. But in fact, Vishnu saved the calf, which was unknown to others. *Gomata* heard the killing of her

calf by Siva and filled the milk sea with her breast milk. Trees and creepers sprouted there.

The next day, Brahma and Vishnu went to the milk sea and found that the milk had turned into curd. They reported it to *Gomata*. *Gomata* said, 'You three brothers churn the sea. *Nirakar* ordered this. When Lakshmi takes birth from the churning of the sea, she shall feed the universe. So, you churn the sea and human beings shall emerge from it.'

'The *Devakula* are in heaven.
The *Nagakula* are in earth
The insects have covered the universe.
The birds and animals have covered four sides.
The water-borne animals are in the sea.
The fish in the water and the birds in the tree
Everybody is present
Without man and woman
The universe is not looking good, it is incomplete.
Without human beings.'

Therefore, Nirakar wanted to churn the sea. He picked up Mandara mountain and placed it in the sea. Vishnu brought Nagaraja Vasuki, took the form of a boar and picked up the earth in his teeth. The churning of the ocean started. *Amruta* came out first. Brahma wiped the sweat from his forehead and the sweat dropped on the earth. From the sweat Vishwakarma was born.

Vishwakarma made one-hundred vessels of gold and the *amruta* (elixir) was preserved. Then emerged the four Vedas. Then came fire, poison, and liquor. Brahma said that the liquor of the sea was different. The Gods took the *amruta* and the liquor was left for the demons. There would be both good and bad. If one took liquor, he would be bad; for he blames others when he takes liquor. Then the musical instruments (*Nishan*, *Muhuri*), *Pushpak Viman*, swan, Garuda (*Kaka*), conch, and *Chakra* emerged.

Brahma wanted to create humans. He sat in *Padmasana* and meditated and came in the form of Satva, Raja and Tama. Then he made six images. Then inverted the tree: its branches were in the earth and its roots in the sky. He gave life to the six images. These six images became six clans. The first clan is Soma, the second is Surya, the third is Jadu, the fourth is Kadam, the fifth is Ganga and the sixth is Gargaba. The six castes gave birth to 36 sub-castes.

Next, Vishnu sprinkled the nectar of the sea on the earth, and trees and roots emerged. Human beings ate the fruits from the trees and survived. But they were still hungry. They were not satisfied with fruits and roots. So, they cried for *anna*.

Gomata said to Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara, 'Let Mahalakshmi (paddy) take birth on the earth; else how will the world function?'

So she pushed the calf into the sea. The calf entered the nether region of Varuna. The calf told Varuna (the God of sea) that it had been sent by the three gods to get

Mahalakshmi. *Nirakar* said to *Adimata*, 'Oh prime mother, you create paddy and cotton from your body. You will go to the earth as Mahamayee. You will cover three regions: *Deva* (god), *Manava* (human) and *Danava* (demon) You will be goddess for the Deva, woman for the Manava (man) and demoness for the Danava.

Then Mahalakshmi took birth from the great sea. Brahma asked Vishwakarma to build up a palace in Balichandpur for Lakshmi; she stayed in that palace. Hearing of the birth of Lakshmi, people cried for food. Lakshmi created two girls, *Chhaya* and Rohini (sun's wife). *Sachi* (God Indra's wife) was created in heaven and six clans were created in the earth.

Varuna (God of the sea) said to Vishnu, 'Oh Narayan, you three brothers marry three sisters'.

Therefore, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara married Savitri, Lakshmi and Parvati, respectively. Vrihaspati, the Guru of the Gods, conducted the marriage of the three Gods.

Mahalakshmi said to the seeds (*kilas*) 'be sown and eaten by human beings'. She went to Alkabhubana (Kuverapuri-Kuvera, the God of wealth).

Brahma and Vishnu searched for Lakshmi in Balikhandipur, but did not find her. Then they went to Kuverapuri and brought Lakshmi back. Mahalakshmi said to the three brother-Gods, 'to preserve the universe you should start cultivation.'

She said, 'Iswara (Siva) and Parvati will go to *Martya* (earth). There they will be a farmer-couple. *Gomata* will give two calves (a cow and a buffalo). One will be Jaira and another Manika (Siva's followers). They will be the bullocks and buffaloes for ploughing. Bhima (son of Vayu) will be the ploughman. They shall go to Martyapura (earth).'

For cultivation, iron implements are required. So, Lakshmi said, 'From where shall you get iron? You can cultivate the land only when iron is available'.

Brahma asked his son Vishwakarma to go to the earth and find iron. Vishwakarma went to the earth.

Gomata gave her hide (*Mayavakala chhal*) to make a wind-machine to make fire for the iron workshop. *Adimata* offered a woman to Vishwakarma to paddle the wind machine. Vishwakarma brought iron ore from the jungle and melted it in the fire. Then he made hammers, pliers, axes, etc.

Then Siva (Mahadev) went to the forest to make a plough. He made plough from a *Gohira* tree. He made the plough, Vishwakarma brought the iron share. While doing this, a bird suddenly appeared near Siva. Siva took a particle of the leftover wood and threw it on the bird. The wooden particles turned the bird into an eagle.

Parvati noticed that Siva returned home very late. She was worried because it was very late at night.

So, in the night, Parvati sent a tiger to Siva to scare him back home. The tiger came to Siva and roared. Siva threw some wood particles at the tiger and uttered, 'Kill the

tiger'. The sound reached heaven and two animals, the *Kok* (wild dog) and jackal, took birth out of those particles. The *Kok* was very powerful and chased the tiger. The tiger took shelter near Parvati. The *Kok* and the jackal saw Parvati and being afraid of her, ran into the jungle. Siva returned home at night.

The wind God (*Pavan*) ordered his son Bhima to use the Jaira (buffalo) and the Manika (bullock) for ploughing. They started ploughing in the Sunabeda plateau. Brahma tied a turban on the head of the Vayu to create clouds. The four clouds created rain on earth. In Sunabeda, Rupabeda, Changurbeda, and Mangurbeda, he levelled the land. The three Gods went to Kuvera to get paddy and were followed by thirty-three Gods. They got 60 *Puti* (1 puti is about 80 kilogram) of paddy from Kuvera. Bhima ploughed the field and Siva sowed the seed.

The paddy sprouted, but there was no rain. Goddess Lakshmi (paddy) hid under the earth and did not appear. So, Bhima said to the three Gods, 'Install a stone at the outskirts of the village. The name of the place will be Gramapati (chief of the village). Install another stone beside it. It will be known as Dharni Devta (earth Goddess). Another stone will symbolize Agni Kumari - Virgin Fire. This Goddess will bless man and animal alike. I am the first ploughman. I will be worshipped in a stone. In the outskirts of the village, Mata Thakurani will be worshipped; beside her will be Pat Brahmanin. In the middle, Goddess Lakshmi will be worshipped beside her will be Adya Niranjani. Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, and *Niraakaara* will be worshipped in Devsnan-yatra, Gods will bathe in tender milk.'

Accordingly, the village gods and goddesses were installed. They invoked the gods and goddesses and rain appeared in the earth. Bhima asked Vishwakarma to make a paddy-cutter. All the gods engaged themselves in the reaping of paddy. They stored the paddy on the threshing floor. The paddy of 15 *yayana* became two and half *unga*.

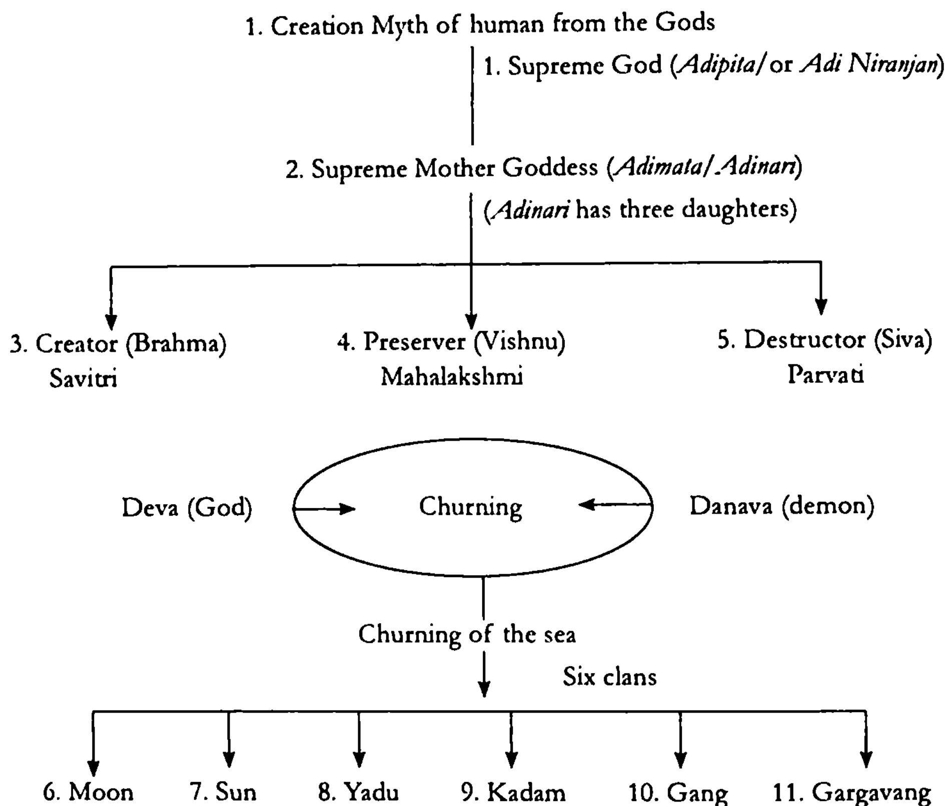
Siva asked Bhima, 'How much paddy did you get?' Bhima said, 'two and half *unga*'. Siva ordered Bhima to burn the paddy. The fire burnt for 7 days and 7 nights. The smoke covered the nether region. The three gods extinguished the fire. The paddy that survived were named *Kalia* (Black), *setka* (yield in 60 days), *pora* (7 days), etc. The four kinds of cultivation are: *Khar*, *Bihuda*, *Rupa*, and *Achhra*. The first cultivators collect the paddy. The king collects the paddy later. The man who collected the paddy at first are the first cultivators.

If the people cultivate the land,
They will get paddy
The king will get the paddy from the cultivators
And he will rule the state.

Paramananda Debguru, Debgunia (Parsuram Gaur, Ghaint Guda)

1. The whole mythical epic is about the creation of the universe and the origin of mankind. This also involves the stratification of human beings from a state of food gatherers to food producers. The initiation of cultivation by the gods and goddesses are symbolically represented in the myth. The myth may

be represented as the following graph for understanding the dynamics of its creation.



From each clan emerged six castes

6 X 6 = 36 castes (*Chhaada kula Chhatish jati*)

No. 1 to 5 God's domain (Heaven - *Swarga*)

No. 6 to 11 and 36 castes human domain (World - *martya*)

2. Worldview of *Janam khena Puran* (Origin myth of gods, earth, nature, human and paddy and validation of gods and goddesses with nature)

Space	Universe	Characters/ Events (God/ Human/ Demon)	Symbol
swarga	sky	Supreme God and supreme goddess/ (demon created by supreme God) Musical instruments, soma, chariot, conch, wheel.	Formless
martya	earth	1. During churning of sea - Earth, paddy, cow, iron, musical 2. During human settlement as the cultivator: Buffalo, cow, share, plough, liquor, paddy, etc.	
patala	water	Milk sea, sea, churning of sea, paddy hidden in the water,	

Events: Stages of origin of human beings and then the creation of nature, social stratification, and then human settlement from food gatherer to food producer, validation of nature worship with classical Hindu gods and goddesses, synchronization of local gods and goddesses with Hindu gods and goddess.

1. A demon was created from the ear-dirt of the supreme god and his rivalry with Brahma, the creator of the earth, resulted in the killing of the demon by Brahma's mother *Adimata*. The demon was then sacrificed and creation of earth and nature took place.
2. For creation of man, the supreme goddess copulated with her son Siva - a state of promiscuity where the social rules were not in force (or may be a symbolic representation of some natural objects).
3. The tender calf drank the milk of the milk sea and Siva killed the calf (of course, Vishnu saved the calf and Siva did not know this).
4. Brahma created six clans of human beings and they created thirty-six castes with different occupation (*Chhaadu kula*, *Chhatish jati*).
5. Human beings lived on fruits and roots.
6. Siva, the first cultivator initiated paddy cultivation (invention of agricultural implements) and finally cultivated paddy.
7. Installation of gods and goddesses in the village as the symbol of the worldview that is imagined in the *Janam khand Puran* (Creation myth)

3. Installation of Gods and Goddess in the Village

The stages of installation of the gods and goddesses according to the *Janam khand Puran* is a later synchronization of classical Sanskrit myths with local gods and goddesses (especially objects of nature worship). This indicates the two stages:

1. Nature worship by the tribal people such as the worship of earth mother goddess, sun god, water god, forest goddesses, mountain gods, tree god, small-pox goddesses, etc.
2. Next, when cultivation was accepted as the occupation by the tribals and the non-tribals, validation of the village gods and goddesses was been made with the sacred texts.

The village worship *gudi* - is a hut where the following gods and goddess are installed and worshipped.

1. *Gram pati*—The name of the village god: Chief and Guardian god of the village,
2. *Dharni Devta*—earth Goddess,
3. *Lakshmi*—goddess of wealth and paddy,
4. *Adya Niranjani*—supreme mother,
5. *Bhima*—ploughman of Siva who was the first cultivator,
6. *Agni Kumari*—virgin fire goddess who blesses man and animal,
7. *Mata Thakurani*—worshipped at the outskirts of the village, small-pox goddess,
8. *Pat Bramhanin*—local goddess accompanying Mata.

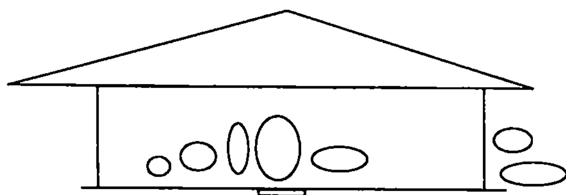
Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva are occasionally worshipped in the village *gudi* which means the supreme gods are invoked during special occasions, and the local gods and goddesses are invited as and when necessary. The purposes are to face the external dangers, curing of diseases, safety from snakes, tigers, and unseen dangers, praying for good rain and harvest.

Selection of a Sacred Place for Worship of all the Gods and Goddesses.

Placement of gods and providing space for each god and goddess depending on their status narrated in the mythical epic may be diagrammatically represented:

Picture: from left to right gods and goddesses are installed in the village *gudi*.

They are (from left to right): 1. *Agnikumari* 2. Bhima 3. *Adya Niranjani* 4. Lakshmi 5. *Dharani Devta* 6. (outskirts of the *gudi*) *Mata* 7. Pat Bramhanin.



Janam khena Puran is a performance-oriented ritual epic, which is present in the religious practice of the agricultural society, irrespective of tribal and castes. The worldview of greater Hindu mythological tradition is interpolated in the local imagination, and the nature myth is synchronized with the classical myth keeping the characters and events to validate the text and ritual in the village setting.

Chapter 12

DROUGHT SONGS

Durbhikshya Boli

(A folk poet Sri Manohar Meher of Sinapali (1885-1969) had witnessed the seven famines of 1899 (the Vikram Sambat 1956),[1] which was popularly known as *chhapan salar durbhikshya*. At the time of the famine, he was 16 years of age. The drought affected the socio-economic life of the people of that region so deeply that it was engrained in the people's memory for a pretty long time and even after a hundred years had passed, the chhapan sal famine became a legend in the collective mind of the people of Kalahandi.

Many proverbs and songs on drought were written by writers and also orally transmitted by folk poets. A proverb runs *akal bele duha gai and judh bele pithier bhai*, the literally meaning of which is 'a milking cow is helpful during drought and one's own brother is helpful during a war.'

Similarly, when a child cries in hunger after her mother for food, the mother says, 'why are you hankering after food like a drought-stricken victim of *chhapansal*? Manohar Meher has written hundreds of songs. *Durbhikshya Boli* is a song which is available both in oral and written form. The *raga* of the song is Sindhuda which is recited for representing certain narrations only.

'O, hereafter listen, O learned audience / men
The condition of famine
It accrued in 1956 of king Vikram Sambat (1899)
A great disaster came.
Listen to that, the cattle, men were affected and agriculture failed.
Indra, the rain god, gave rain from *chaitra* (April) to *vaisakh* (May).
The cultivators became happy
And sowed the paddy, happily
They took loan and sowed the seeds
Their home became empty.
They got 40 kgs of paddy for a rupee,
So people spent their time.
But then the bad time came.

The downpour of rain was in *Asadh* (July)
But the rain failed during *Sravana* (August).
Looking at the condition of the field.
The cultivators lost their courage.
They killed their cows and buffalos and the low-caste people ate it.
The government stopped this act and saved them
by opening food centres from place to place.
And also gave *tagabi* loan to people
But that was also not sufficient
People started plundering the loan money on the way.
Poor people did not get anything and ate *Mahul* and *Char* berry
Four kgs of rice was sold for a rupee,
So they ate roots and leaves,
The thieves and dacoits did not get anything
They waited on the way.
Plundered the money of others and
Earned their livelihood.
By this way, the poor people lived here.
The rich people were happy taking delicious food.
They watched their houses, paddy, and rice, being afraid of theft.
The thieves stole their property.

The sky unusually looked red,
The air was like fire,
A fierce goddess entered the villages
And killed the people with diseases.
So people remained in their homes
And did not go outside.
In this great famine,
Some died and some survived.
Houses with many women were the abodes of quarrels.
"You took the food first and gave me at last
you did not obey me, get lost from my house.
You are no more capable of working here".
Brothers abused sisters,
Cousins abused aunts,
Wives left their old husbands.
That year, the revenue department collected grazing tax.
Go-char tax (Kharchari)[2]
They did not allow the cattle to
Graze in the field.
They did it for looting money.
Such injustice had never been seen.

Thanks to the government,
Thanks for your favour,
Your glory is widespread in the whole world.
You saved the lives of the poor, by providing food and cloth.
During this drought, an uncommon thing happened.
A woman begot four children.
With four ears and four eyes.
People went to see the child.
After some time, the child passed away.
It was written in the birth register.
(Manohar Meher, writes this poem on *Chhapan Sal* famine)

Drought Narrative Song

The drought appeared in 1956, people
Encompassing Kalahandi, Sinapali, Boden, and Khariar
Died of starvation.
Who will narrate the condition of the drought?
Komna, Boden, and Khariar (blocks)
The men and women, boys and girls
Of tender age
Having not experienced life
Died of hunger and thirst.

The cultivators sowed the paddy
Khardi paddy
In *Akhyaya trutiya*
They sowed the seeds which
They had stored over the past years
With all care.
Worshipping the earth goddess,
During the festival of *Akhyaya trutiya*
The cultivators thought that,
When the first rain of the monsoon
Falls on their field
The paddy will sprout and
Good saplings will appear.
They will get a better harvest.
Oh no! The *Jeth* (May-June) ended
The *Asadh* (rainy month) came
But there was no cloud in the sky
There was not a single drop of rain from the sky
The seeds sown in the field

Dried and died
What shall we do?
The farmers putting their hands
On their forehead
Said, how can we live?
Rain has not come
Bhima *devta* was cruel
He did not gave water from the heavens
The seeds died in the soil.
What shall we do?
A saying runs, if you
Fail to educate your children
Then you lose a lifetime.
Likewise, if you fail in cultivation
Once, you lose one year.
If one year is lost in cultivation
It will affect us for three years.
How can we survive?
People went to the *Jhankar*
To ask whether rain will appear.
The *Jhankar* wanted the answer
From the rain god Bhima, worshipped
Under the fig tree
Bhima was worshipped,
With goddess Kondhen
The *Jhankar* called the *Dihari*
The doms played music
The Nisan[3] sounded *kind gidin*
The muhuri sounded *tihiriti*
The tasa sounded *kada kuda jham*
The shaman-Dihari inhaling the
Incense along with the smoke of red chilli
Nodding his hairy head
Started dancing on being possessed by
Bhima, the rain god.
Bhima, the rain god,
Wanted to dance with the
Young girls of the village.
The young girls assembled
in the worship place
And started dancing with the rain god Bhima
The songs of
Union of a man with a woman

Were sung by Bhima.
And to the tune of the music
They danced with Bhima
Putting their hands on the waist of Bhima.
The farmers were looking up
to the red sky (inauspicious)
if some hope of rain appears
in the form of black clouds.
The Dom musicians were asked
By Bhima to
Play the music faster
With the speed of the rhythm
With the sound and the spirit
The gods and goddess will be satisfied
And will pour down rain.
But, ah, not even a small
Cloud appeared in the sky.
Not a single drop of rain fell
People watched the ritual, *Jhankar*
Asked the rain god
'Oh Bhima, why don't you
Urinate on the earth
The earth will be wet with your urine.'
Bhima replied,
'You did not give me black cock
You did not worship me with liquor,
My uncle Indra is annoyed with the
Narmanja (human beings).'
The musicians stopped the music
The young girls stopped dancing.
The *Jhankar* was trying to
convince the rain god.
But the doms musician said,
'Oh see, it is understood that
Rain is not available in the earth
But it is not known why
Rain is not available in the heaven
Or else why Bhima is unable to
Get rain from Indra, his uncle.'

In the month of *Bhadrab* (August-September)
The sown paddy is harvested
The bright moon of *Bhadrab*

On the fifth day of the bright moon
of *Bhadrab*, the *Nuakhai*
New-rice eating ceremony is observed.
The new rice is offered to the village goddess
And also to the clan goddess, wearing new clothes
After offering the new rice to the goddess
in *Kurei* (*Kutaja*) leaf, people eat
new rice.
After that, the *Juharen* (obeisance) to
the elders takes place, saying
'we will meet again if we are alive for a few more years,'
People go from one house to another
And pay respect to the elders.
In the evening
The young boys and girls dance and
Sing *Rasarkeli* and *Dalkhai* song.

Oh, this year people forgot *Nuakhai*
The remaining seeds and paddy
Were also eaten.
Nuakhai – the new-rice ceremony was forgotten
Because of the hot sun, the grasses died,
Paddy dried in the field
The land was empty, soil was cracked
The hopes of the farmers also lost
The cattle, the goat and the sheep
Faced trouble for food and water.
Parents thought
'How shall we survive?
How to save our life and
Our children's life?
Where from will we get food?
It is not understood, what is in our future.'

The rice and paddy were
Empty in the house
The rice pot was emptied with
The stock within a month or two,
The rice plate was empty.
Properties such as gold and silver
in the house, as the symbols of hope,
Were sold to the *Mahajan*'s (richman) house

Measured in hands, for paddy.
But the quantity of
Purchased paddy was very small.
How long could that solve the problems?
How long could that save life?
So people went to the jungle for
Kendu and *Char* and
They ate raw roots and
boiled tamarind leaves, to save their lives.
People of low castes
Ate beef,
Although knowing that it was prohibited
And they would lose their caste status.
People forgot their castes
Hunger made them one
They forgot low and high castes
People were carrying roots and leaves from the forest.
They collected tamarind leaves from the tree.
Drought made the human race powerless.
The women from prestigious families
Came out of their homes
In search of food, leaving out their
Shame and status,
Came out to beg in the streets.
They became beggars
Went from village to village
Love, affection, courtesy,
All were lost in the drought.
Mothers left their babies, and fled with other men,
Husbands left the houses
Leaving behind their wives and children,
In search of food, in search of jobs
To save their lives.

An old man of Jhirnikhol village aged
Seventy, named Majhi Budha
Was unable to walk due to starving
Laid down on the cot
Was counting his days.
His son, daughter-in-law
Grandsons and granddaughters
left the house at night
Leaving the old man alone.

Left for their own survival.
Who would lift the old man?
He was left alone.
It was a time when the
Wife left her husband because of hunger
the mother sold her child for some rice.
With the hope that her child would survive
With its foster mother
The husband left his wife
The father left his children,
It was a time when each one was
Unable to save himself,
Who would bother for a person like Majhi Budha?
The old man already, caught the bed
Majhibudha only took water,
Uttering 'Hey Ram, Hey Ram'
He was waiting to breathe his last
The news spread that
An old man was left out
By his son
The government officials came with
Rice, dal, and medicine
To save him from hunger.
The old man was asked to take
Rice, dal, and medicine
He said, 'since the last eight days
I have taken only water
Now I don't take water also
I am taking only air,
When I stop taking air,
My life will end.
For this handful of rice
My son, his wife, and their children
Left this home, without considering me
Helpless at this age, they left me.
They left me, alone, abandoned.
For what pleasure I would
take this food?
The hungry face of my son,
his wife, and their children
are visible to me.
I don't have any greed to survive
I am like a dry leaf of a tree

the last drop of water in a pitcher
the last rays of the setting sun in the west
How can I take this food?
I can see the helpless faces of my children
Why should I live?
When all of them have left me, isolated
At this age
I don't have any greed to live'
Two drops of tears rolled down from the
Old man's eye
With a hopeless look, he saw everybody -
His village folk and the official offering him relief,
His face was pale, chest
Compressed and expanded
He breathed his last.
Shouldering the sorrows and miseries
Of the whole universe
The old man left this world.
Breathed his last with two drops of tears in his eyes.

How many stories would I narrate to you
How many lives will I tell you about?
How many families, devastated, fled, and perished
Should I tell you?
Oh, this is an endless story
It will not end, far in the heart of
Each man and woman
Hides a story of sorrows and miseries
The story of hunger and starvation
The story of survival during disaster.
(Sung by Bedamati Dei, Boden)

The first written narratives represent two different times of Kalahandi: the period of 1899, which is known as *Chhapan Salar Durbhikshya*. Second narrative is on the drought of 1966, occurred in Kalahandi. (Mishra 1990)[4]

> 'Drought is a natural calamity occurred recurringly in the district of Kalahandi over a century. A long history of drought covering more than a century in Kalahandi has occurred. Drought had occurred in Kalahandi in 1868, 1884 and 1897. The famine of 1899, which is otherwise known as *Chhapan Salar Durbhikshya*, has seriously influenced the people to such an extent that if a child hankers for food, her mother tells the child "why are you hankering like a drought-affected child of Chhapan sal?" "The effect of the famine," according to the District Gazetteers, "were of a magnitude unprecedented in any previous famine." This

famine left a terrible socio-economic gloom in this area. In 1919-1920 another drought occurred followed by cholera, influenza and malnutrition due to lack of foodstuff. A series of droughts in 1922–1923, 1925–1926, 1929–1930, 1954–1955 and 1955–1956 occurred in Kalahandi.'

While the above two narratives reflect the effects of drought on the life of the people, they also remember the characters and events that occurred in the locality. The precarious condition of the cultivators and the wage labourers is narrated in the song. The events are universal. Irrespective of caste, gender, and status, everyone took shelter in relief food camps (*anna chhatra*). This was considered to be an insult and disrespect to the people, because people from all castes took food free of cost. Therefore, upper-caste people hesitated to take food from the relief camps and were taking rice to cook in their houses.

Similarly, gold was available in plenty to be exchanged for rice and therefore the money lenders purchased the gold by measuring it using their hand and paid a very low price for it. Paddy fields were left for the cattle. During the famine of 1966, distressing acts found during the drought were:

- Women from affluent families also coming out to the relief camps for food,
- People in charge of relief were uncompassionate and were corrupt,
- Some people were plundering the paddy from the government stores,
- People became so self-centred that husbands left their wives and children without notice,
- Wives left their husbands and children and eloped to save their lives. Such self-centredness had never happened in the history of Kalahandi,
- The visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was a solution, and people thought that Goddess Lakshmi herself had appeared to save their lives. It is usual practice that poor people, when helped by some one address the helper as Goddess Lakshmi,
- There was severe water scarcity,
- People tried to overcome the drought through supernatural ways by worshipping the rain god,
- The drought turned the traditional life and culture of the people upside down.

The picture of drought in the minds of people was short lived. They capture the picture only in some songs, tales and proverbs. But the scarcity of water and getting good harvest is reflected in the traditional oral epics. Even the prayers for good rain and good harvest is found in the traditional myth and rituals of Kalahandi. Therefore, during the drought, people depended on supernatural intervention to get water, but failed. But the picture of drought is reflected in songs and proverbs of Kalahandi.

Notes and References

[1] Vikram Sambat is the name of a calendar which is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian year.

[2] Khar means Kusha - it means the kusha is not used by the cow. Thus even the grass was also not sprouted. And the land became barren.

[3] Nishan, Muhuri, Tasa - musical instruments.

[4] Mishra, MK, (2002), Drought in Folklore and Folklife of Kalahandi, in Visioning Folklore, *Essays on Folkloristic of Western Orissa*, Lark Books, Bhubaneswar, Pp.49-51.

13

OBSERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

A special feature of the epic scene in India is the abundance of living oral epics. Not only are the classic Sanskrit epics still very much alive in both oral and written performance, they also interact with a multitude of local epic formations with or without affinity of plot, poetic means, mode of performance or performative style. India is a place where scholarly discoveries can be made and practically unknown epics of a longer or shorter format documented in oral composition and performance.

(Lauri Honko in *Text as process and practice* in *Textualization Oral Epics* [2000])[1]

Oral Epics in Kalahandi are found among the specialist singers and priests in ritual context and performance context. Because it is an endangered folk genre (of course, here prose has not yet replaced poetry), it is found among select ethnic groups. This is also found only among select people specialized in the singing of the epic songs.

Epics are not as popular as folk songs. Epics are not like the entertainment folksongs, which are widespread all over the region or shared by all people. Instead, oral epics and myths are very much limited to the senior persons of the community. The purpose of these epics and sung narrative/myths is to maintain their tradition, ensure social control, perpetuate ethnic identity, maintain group solidarity, and perform in religious ceremonies. Epics of the ethnic community help the people to learn from their past and shape the future. They learn how and why a particular custom is observed in their caste and not by others. They also remember their ancestors from the epics and myths. On the basis of the available epic narratives and myths from the selected seven communities, the following classificatory scheme has been made to discover the realm of oral epics in Kalahandi. In this scheme, the written myths and epics such as *Kaivarta Geeta* (Creation myth of fisher folk)and *Kurala Purana* (Creation myth of the potter community) have not been included as these are pan-Oriya materials. Priority is given to the oral tradition, which is fast vanishing.

Epics in Kalahandi may be classified into the following categories as presented in the table given below. They are:

1. Mythic/ ritualistic
2. Heroic

3. Sacrificial
4. Social

Although mythical epics are very old and believed to be true, they are alive because they are practised in the religious life cycle of the community. They are symbols of many gods and goddesses. But the heroic epics are more imaginary with a base of realism in the events. Sacrificial epics are female centric: mostly on self-sacrifice for achieving another world. This can be compared with the funeral rites of the King of Bali. Clifford Geertz,[2] in *Local Knowledge*, has mentioned how three women in Bali were ready to die with the deceased King of Bali in his funeral pyre so as to get the status of queens in heaven after their death. The sacrificial epics are thus to die and dedicate themselves to get better birth in the unseen world. Social epics are the events that have occurred in the recent past, that are vivid in the memory of the community.

There are some written epics, which are equally important in terms of its content and form as these written songs are also available in oral form.

CLASSIFICATORY SCHEME OF ORAL EPICS IN KALAHANDI

Table -I

Tribe/Caste	Gond	Kondh	Bhunjias	Paharia (Kamar)
Population	(3,58,752)	(2,31,829)	(9,514)	(3,492)
Language of Narration	Local Oriya mixed with Gondi	Kondhan Language	Chuktia Bhunjia	Kamarn
Bard	Parghania	Boguas, Maral	Priest (M) Gurumai(F)	Geet kudia
Mythic/ ritualistic	Gond Creation Myth (1) (2)	1. Gova Utra 2. Bhima Sidi 3. Creation Myth	1. Origin: Sunadi 2. Sunadi myth	1. Bada devtar Khena 2. Linga Bhaiat
Heroic/ Romantic Martial	Chital Singh Chhatri	Nangmati - Rajaphulia Bhima (Nangar Khena)	Tulsiveer Kachhra Dhurua	Gandhu *paradhia*
Sacrificial		Manduka Majhi		
Epics both in oral and Written Form	The Gondvani Gonduki Puran Allah Udal Purja (Palm leaf Mss)		Allah Udal	
Social	Mandhar Majhi Raja			Maa randi po tura

Tribe/Caste	Banjara	Debgunia	Gouda (Caste)	Other castes
(Population)	(10,347)	(553)	(3,80,946)	
Language of Narration	Banjari	Standard Oriya	Local Oriya (koshali)	Koshali
Bard	Bhat Singer people	Singer caste	Ghogia, Jachak	-
Mythic/ ritualistic	Meramma	Janam Khand Puran	----	(Lohra) Blacksmith Jantar meheli
Heroic/ Romantic Martial	1. Hiro Diwani		Kotrabaina-Ramela, Kharatmal, Madhab-Rupmati, Rupadiar - Hirandi.	-
Sacrificial	2. Ramji Huna sati 3.Raja Isalu			-
Epics both in oral and Written Form		Lakshmi Puran	Harivamsa Puran	Kurala Puran/ Kaivarta Geeta/Hatid-hara geet/Kondhmeli, Drought song
Social				Drought songs

Features of Oral Epics in Kalahandi

The classificatory scheme displayed in the above table indicates that the epics are collected from five tribes, one caste and one singer-caste. Except the Banjara tribe, all the castes and tribes are natives and they share the common cultural traits and worldview.

Epics in Kalahandi may be interpreted by studying its purpose, content, context, texture, and epic singers.

I. Purpose of Epic Performance:
   a. Ethnic Identity,
   b. Maintaining social ethics,
   c. Progeny and prosperity

II. Epic Characters:
a. Gods and Goddesses,
b. Birds and animals,
c. Hero, Heroine and others

III. Epic Landscape. Nature: time and space

IV. Context: ritual context/social context

V. Texture (length/Oral formula and oral transmission/ language/ images/ style/Narrative features/ multigeneric)
VI. Singers:(Professional/occasional/secular/sacred)

I. Purpose of Epic Performance

Oral epic is created in a society with a definite purpose and function. Epics are performed for entertainment and romance, dissemination of information, sanctioning of conduct, and preservation of the memory of past events.[3] In view of the above, it is necessary to understand why and how the community needs the epic as a socio-cultural necessity. It's function is social as well as transcendental relating to the visible world of reality and also the invisible imaginary world. Epics have fulfilled the expression of a whole cultural realm to its fullest manifestation of creativity and also, connected the values and morals with the social reality.

'The epic poets themselves claim to provide information about great events', says Duggan, 'and many that claim a step further in that they present themselves as generating sanctions for the conduct they recount: praise in the case of laudable action and blame when the person in question acted basely. Sanctioning is closely related to the informational aspect, since it functions as a special imparting of information, the conferring of value upon deeds.'[4]

Kalahandi as a multiethnic social system has three levels of social groups sharing a composite culture. These are the forest culture, agricultural society and the urban centres of power and knowledge. But the interaction and integration of these cultural communities with different values and beliefs, traditions, and customs have created a worldview of integration. But this integration does not sacrifice the ethnic identity or the group solidarity of any social or ethnic group. Instead, each ethnic group consciously tried to identify their cultural expressions either to protest or to safeguard their interest as a distinct ethnic group with a separate identity and also to assimilate in the greater cultural tradition.

a. Ethnic Identity

Alan Dundes refers the term 'folk' to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor, sharing common occupation, language or religion having a distinct group identity.[5] He says that 'Folk groups are those of an ethnic, racial, religion or occupational character'.

Studying the role of folklore in retaining ethnic identity, Hoppal writes, 'Folklore as creative communicative process articulates different forms of ethnic symbolism, and being a part of social reality, belongs to the mechanism of culture which reproduces the ethnic consciousness of identity of the given people.'[6]

Jansen is of opinion that 'Folklore not only acts as a unifying force in terms of one group's identity but also as a divisive force in terms of moulding or confirming attitude towards another'.[7]

Ethnic identity, nowadays, has a meaning which is keenly related to ethnic self-consciousness. 'Ethnic self consciousness,' writes Broomley, 'means the awareness of their particular unity and distinguish themselves from other similar formalities.'[8]

Sharp,[9] defining the role of ethnic identity writes, ethnic groups differed from each other by virtue of objective cultural differences. The members of an ethnic group speak one language, hold to a distinct set of practices and show a common interest and would naturally unite in order to propagate and defend their interest.

Ethnic identity is thus maintained through the language, rituals, customs, food, dress, manner, speech, dance, music and such other aspects of culture of a particular ethnic group, which would be distinguished from others. More specifically, the oral tradition of each ethnic group bears the ethnic characteristics, through language symbols and cultural objectives.

The caste distribution and the inter-ethnic relation with respect to sharing the cultural commonality and retaining their own ethnic identity is found in the folklore of Kalahandi. Co-existing ethnic groups project a composite and universal Indian sub-culture; they do not completely give up their ethnicity and cultural moorings. There are certain reasons and social roles to maintain their ethnic identity. The economically dominant groups have the ideological predomination upon the minor ethnic groups living with them. In such cases the arts and ideologies of the dominant group influence the culture of ethnic minority, as a result of which they assimilate with the dominant culture. In some cases, they feel insecure and their group identity is threatened. So they try to maintain their ethnic identity by retaining the esoteric cultural peculiarities of the group.

Defining the concept of ethnicity from an Indian point of view, Mallick observes,

> In a jati or a class, a person's self-evaluation appears strongly influenced by the ranking of his class so that upper class people tend to feel individually superior while lower class people tend to feel individually inferior. Therefore a significant fact of consistency of components is to endow the system with distinctive identity and tone. (Mallick, 1975: 35-36)[10]

Mallick is of the opinion that in such cases, myths, epics and other such areas of culture act as meaningful items of social control rather direct control (Mallick, 1975: 35-36). He further says that this holds specially true for different ethnic (minority) or religious groups and protest groups, whereby they may be able to maintain solidarity *(Ibid)*.

In other genres of folklore such as folksongs and proverbs, the influence of social change is clearly discernible. It is very difficult to find the source of social change from the oral epics of the discussed region. Of course, there are some signs of social change such as substitution in the ritual practices. For instance, the offering a sheep in the place of a buffalo, or description of the sacrifice where the human sacrifice is substituted by a buffalo.

Although the oral myths and epics are confined to their ethnic groups, the influence of classic literature is found in the content. It is not possible to infer whether the local

tradition has influenced the classical one over a period of time or the classic literature of India has influenced the local culture. But interestingly, the interchangeability of texts in both oral and written and in many forms such as performance (drama, dance, and recitation) rituals and festivals has retained the cultural tradition in the community. It is found that many episodes of the Sanskrit and purana texts have been reinterpreted and transformed into many local episodes in local imagination. Some examples are found in the epics discussed in this volume.

Friend-caste and enemy-caste are a sub section of ethnic identity. It is the friend-caste that helps the caste in danger. Also there are some enemy-castes which are historically antagonistic to each other. This leads to the formation of a cluster of caste groups with have common interests. This is again determined by the interdependence in economy that leads to social solidarity.

It is also a common curiosity of the other castes to know about the caste songs of the tribal community as they have a close affinity with them. Thus the Doms among the Kondhs, the Gaurs among the Gonds, the Lahars among the Binjhal, the Kumhars among the Bhunjia, the barbers among the Paraja, the Paiks among the Bhatras, and the Devgunias among the Gaurs take part in performance as audience. They are also narrated as the *mitra jati* - friend caste in the epic. They have played certain supportive roles in promoting their caste, and helped in their difficulties.

The neighbouring community also takes part in the social occasion as though the family rites are not different from each other. Sharing of oral narratives thus shapes the plurality of culture and the singers mould their texts. It is revealed in the Gaur epic that even the *paik* which was not found earlier, has been found as an enemy-character. This happened because of the co-settlement of the Paiks with the Gaurs and the latter might have been the victims of diplomacy.

While friend-castes are found in some epics, some *shatru jati* are also found narrated in the epic songs. Even for distribution of land, the milk-brothers have fought against each other. The men close to the powerful man are always dangerous and cannot be trusted.

Another type of relation between the castes is kinship, which is found in the epics. The seven brother-Gonds married seven daughters of Dhurua, and thus the kinship relation of Gond and Dhurua began. In the Binjhal narrative of achieving the Bora Sambar kingdom, the 12 brother-Binjhals married the Lohra girls. The Bhunjias are the creation of the Gond and Halwa. In creation myths of the tribal people of Kalahandi, brother–sister incest was frequent. Initially, there was no kin. The creation of man is the result of the union of the first brother and sister.

The socio-historical context is another arena of epic text, which is stable and static. We cannot change the mythical structure (character, events and space) because it is attached to the geographic and historical setting of the story. The creation myths of the Gonds, the Kondhs, the Bhunjia and the Kamars have their own land and territories but it is seen that though the Gond and Kondh myths have adopted some changes in the epic content such as adopting the Purana texts in their ritual process, the Bhunjia and the Kamar myths have not accepted it.

b. Maintaining Social Ethics:

Myths and epics have its social purpose and therefore it has its function, context and meaning. While the mythical narratives are closely associated with calenderic rituals/ festivals (*Bhima sidi*, Sunadi festival, Buffalo sacrifice etc.) some epics are free from such restrictions, are heroic and social and they are narrated before the community to spell the glorious history / legend of their past. In the Gaur community, *Barakhena Bansgeet* was recited during the occasion of inviting the bride and groom to the groom's house and the Ghogia–caste singer used to sing the epic story for an hour or two in the marriage ceremony. The purpose was to spell the caste glory to the newly wed bride and groom, so that they would be socialized into their community and maintain the dignity of their clan.

While initiating the epics/ myths, the singer sings the purpose of the singing. The first purpose is to worship the supreme god and goddesses for the well being of their community. Next, to worship the supreme gods and goddesses, ancestor-god (de-*duma)*, first progenitor (mythical characters) to bless them in perpetuating their race with glory. This also involves the fight and victory over other enemy-castes (*shatru jati)* and to get help and assistance from the friends, and kin castes *mite-gote (mitra* and *gotra)*.

The worldviews and the values they inherit from the tradition are manifested in their cultural practices and customs. Violation of such customs results in social degeneration. So, they strictly maintain their social rules and codes. Their traditional social organization (Jati Mahasabha) always formulates rules and regulations and propagates the community through social congregation of all senior persons *(sianlok)*. The decision of the community is final and nobody breaks the social rues. Violation of social rules leads to breach of customary law and the result is social punishment. With the change of society, they mould their social rules.

c. Epic for Progeny and Prosperity:

The purpose of listening to the myths and epics, according to Indian poetics, are four-fold. They are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Of these, Dharma and Moksha stand for higher philosophical order and have found a place in the sacred texts, whereas *kama*[11] and *artha* are two elements predominant in the oral epics and myths. Therefore, the oral epics bear the picture of occupation-based ethnic culture as well as maintaining the lineage through marriage. Therefore, most of the epics end with the marriage of hero and heroine. The land, territory, power and settlement of their clan are validated in the epics and myths, which are considered to be the conventional history of the tribes. The lands are signified by a particular tribe (Sunabeda plateau for Bhunjia, Kalahandi for Kondhs, and Khariar region for the Gonds).

Content:

Generally epics in Kalahandi are the story of the ancestors, culture heroes, and legendary heroes of the communities. The epics are caste-based having social function with specific purpose and meaning. The patron in ritual context, or the audience in ordinary performance context patronize the caste bard to perform the singing.

Regarding the text of oral epics in Kalahandi it may be inferred that there is a direct or indirect connection between the myth, legend and epic. The inter-changeability of events and characters, and also the motifs or the tale types transplanted from one genre to another, adoption of mythical hero as the epic hero, synchronization of the features of folktales in oral epics by the epic singers with some universal characters of narrative world are basic characteristics of an oral epic. The ritual-myth and religious narratives have an intrinsic relationship with the romantic epics, because the local gods/ clan deities also appear in the epics, visible or invisible, and regulate the fate of the hero and heroine.

Therefore, the epics of Kalahandi are broadly ethnic and religious in nature. Religious narratives are myths; they are believed to be true. Although the myths were of the remote past, they do exist in the race memory and religious practice, associating the past with the present generation. Creation of the universe, nature, animals, human being, and spiritual world is the content of mythical narratives. These narratives are closely associated with castes and tribes, found in rites and rituals, and regulate the social customs and rules. Epics in Kalahandi are tradition-bound and are related to the remote past as mythical and social history as caste epic. In any traditional society, 'the myth represents the history of oral culture, while history is the myth of literal culture.' (Hastrup,1987:260).[12] Interpreting the Maori culture, Siikala observes,

> Mythical world history is just as much the history of human and deities as of forefathers and superhuman heroes. Both myth and history are symbolic forms of connecting the past and present.[13]

While the myth has the social function of determining the complex worship process in rituals, the oral epics with heroic action are the extension of imagination in which the same mythical thought is manifested for human wisdom. The epics, therefore, reflect the ability of the hero through his virtue on one hand, and as an object of fate on the other. The *karma* and *bhagya* play important roles in the epics of Kalahandi. The supreme god created the universe, and his role in regulating the day-to-day affairs of the mankind is minimal. The clan gods and goddesses/village gods and goddess play major roles in the epics.

The legends associated with a geographical area, a fort, or a dynasty or caste are also sung narratives. Mostly these are glorious heroic songs. They may be either heroic or social. The heroic epics are also not free from mythical influence. The singers associate the mythical characters and thought and symbols in heroic epics. And this is the only space for the singers who without any ritual context can perform the epic songs. *Ramai Deo, Kachhara Dhurua, and Mandhar Majhi* are some of the instances of historical legends of Kalahandi found in sung narratives. *Allah Udal* is a Central Indian heroic epic that is adopted into the Manikgarh fort of Nuapada district. In Kalahandi there is a symbiotic relationship between myth, legend, and heroic epics. The legendary heroes are mostly historical, mythical, and imaginary. Even the tribal heroes with recent past, identified with time and space, are also narrated as heroes.

The mythical epics are mostly sung in a ritual performance context within a complex religious significance. The identity of the caste/ tribe is associated with the rituals. The creation myths of the Gonds/Kondh/the Bhunjias/and the Kamar are drawn from the common stock of Indian sub-regional mythology. The mythical events and characters are also associated with some place, although the time is not discernable from the text. Lauri Honko, while studying Indian Siri epics observes that,

> *If the epic is myth, performance is ritual. The basic story remains untold as a linear narrative but functions as a mental backdrop filling the minds of the participants (Honko: 1999:45).*[14]

The heroic epics are of two categories. While the epic of *Chital Singh Chhatri* (Gond) and the Gaur Epic (*Barakhena Bansgeet*) are imaginary in nature, the *Nangmati-Rajaphulia* (Kondh) *Tulseevir* (Bhunjia), *Kachhra Dhurua* (Bhunjia), *Gandhu paradhia* (Kamar), *Hiro Diwani and Ramji Huna Sati* (Banjara) are legendary. *Ramai Deo* is a historical character as the founder of the Chauhan rule in Western Orissa.

Sati (chaste woman) was respected in Indian social life. During the eighteenth century the Sati system was such a dominant feature in Indian life that the women were emulating themselves in the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands to have a place with their husband after death. This practice was suppressed. But it's memory is still in the minds of the people. Rajasthan, West Bengal, Central India, and Orissa have the relics of *sati* stone from early medieval history. The oral narratives of these regions also reflect the glory of sati: *Ramji Huna sati* and *Raja Isalu* are two such oral epics found among the Banjara in which the heroine gave up her life in the funeral pyre of her beloved husband. These epics represent the socio-historical context.

The social epics are drawn from the significant characters and events in the society in terms of some uncommon happenings.

The epic singers also sing stories about the legendary heroes of their recent past drawing the important characters from the region. The epic story of *Mandhar Majhi*, of course, is very uncommon when a singer sings it. The importance of Mandhar Majhi as a legendary hero in the Bhunjia society of Sunabeda plateau (a high land with 64 villages, 3000m. above mean sea level) and his heroic actions (of course, from Bhunjia point of view) is to establish that the Chauhan king of Patna also had submitted to Mandhar Majhi for his magical powers. The Bhunjia epic singer has compensated the loss of glory of their tribal chief by subduing the King of Patna through his tantric knowledge. Therefore, this epic is meant to maintain group solidarity and cultural superiority. At least the king is inferior to the Bhunjia in one aspect and he is not compatible to the Bhunjia in knowing *tantra*. The king can kill a tiger but cannot tame it. If a Bhunjia hero tames a living tiger, then who is considered the hero? The Bhunjia or the king?

The Kondh epic *Manduka Majhi* is based on human sacrifice. There is story based on a taboo of marriage between two clans. The Beska clan cannot have marital relations with the Gahaka clan. Violation of such a social custom is a sin. As Manduka tried to violate it, he was sacrificed before earth goddess. It is generally found that the uncle is always an enemy to his nephew. (The myth of Kamsa and Krishna is repeated in the

Kondh epic). The story is narrated vividly and the Bogua sings the tragic story playing his *dhundhunia.* The purpose of narrating such an epic story in the society is to warn the community of such consequences and to follow the social customs. The social function of the epic is to educate the Kondhs on social rules and customs, and also to present an example among the youths of the Kondh society to maintain the customs than to violate it.

The Kamar (Paharia) epic *Maa randi po tura,* about a widow mother and her son is an event narrating the inter ethnic conflict between the Gonds and the Kamars. A Kamar boy married a daughter of a Gond village chief and in turn the Gond headman wanted his son to get married to the Kamar girl, but he was denied the girl. This epic purports the ethnic superiority.

The main character is Goddess Lakshmi who, in form of a beautiful Kamar girl, appeared in the house of the Kamar widow and became her foster daughter. By the grace of Lakshmi, the Kamar widow became rich, which led the village headman to offer his only daughter to the only son of the Kamar widow. The Gond chief, in turn, wanted to get Lakshmi married to his son. But Lakshmi disappeared and the chief was deceived.

While the Kamar knows the episode, it is unknown to the Gonds because the Kamar language is not intelligible to others.

Besides the above epics, the epics, myths and caste genealogies of the *Lohars* (blacksmith), *Mali*, *Dom*, *Kalar* and Satnami castes are also available. Oral epics such as *Hadukurria katha*, *Tolkasuma Raja katha*, and *Bijmanika khena* are available but in a very distorted form. Variations of the Gaur epic *Kotrabaina Ramela* is available in the Khariar region. Sometimes the characters are changed with the constant function and therefore the flexibility of naming the character is found among the singers. This indicates that there is lack of uniformity in oral epic cycle. This again confirms that the singers seldom sing the epics. If these epics were sung on a regular basis, the storylines could have been more concrete and clear to the locality. Absence of performance results in distortion of rest of the memory on oral epics.

Gond singers have *Chital Singh Chhatri* as a long narrative epic which bears the Gond culture. At the same time, the story of Chital Singh among the Gaur community is different from that of the Gond community. In the Gaur version of the Chital Singh story, there are three characters: Chital Singh's elder brother, his wife, and the unmarried Chital Singh. He was addicted to liquor, so his elder brother wanted to get a bride to marry him so that the bride would bring a change in his brother's life. He went to the village headman of another Gaur village (*saga* kin) and wanted to get the headman's daughter married to his brother. The headman cunningly sacrificed the elder brother before his clan goddess. Chital Singh began his journey to find his elder brother and after many difficulties came to know that the village headman had killed his elder brother. The hero in disguise discovered his brother's enemy. He reported it to the police and got them arrested. Inclusion of the police character and the police dress, hat, and gun in the epic reveals that the singers associate the character substituting the king with the police

inspector. Thus the content being same, the singers sometimes change the name of the epic story. Also he substitutes the character keeping the function constant.[15]

The features of the oral epics in Kalahandi are that while the Gond, Kondh, Bhunjia, and Paharia (Kamar) share common cultural traditions, the Banjaras are different. They are a migrant tribe from western India. In Chhatishgarh, they are not considered as a scheduled tribe whereas in Orissa they are a scheduled tribe. Banjara culture is mainly based on north-western India. Therefore, the epic content and the characters vary from the characters and events of other epics of Kalahandi. Banjaras are witty, clever, and creative. The epic of *Raja Isalu* started with the riddling between the queens and Raja Isalu. The questions and answers in the riddles are Indian morals and ethics maintained from the time of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The content of oral epics in Kalahandi may also be analysed from the perspective of the tribe's origin. Kamar and Bhunjia as most primitive, Gond and Kondh as land owners village headmen, Banjara as nomads, Gaurs as settled farmers and milkmen, and the singer community: the stages of human development from primitive to agriculture society. There is a common belief system shared by the tribal and non-tribal people with common interest.

Banjara epic is different from the rest of the epics of Kalahandi. The language of the Banjara epic is also a dialect of Rajasthani Hindi. The king, queen, hero, heroine, sage and tantric yogi are the characters, along with animals such as deer and parrot, buffalo and tiger, etc. The epic story is usually about a chaste woman. The male singers sing the story and therefore women are portrayed as *sati* (chaste woman) in the epic.

Rajasthan is a land of heroes and chaste women who had sacrificed their lives to remain chaste and faithful wives to their beloved husbands. Therefore, the Banjara epics are sacrificial, based on sati system, which was prevalent in the eighteenth century. It is known to us that in North India, in 1982, a woman named Rup Kanwar sacrificed her life in the funeral pyre of her deceased husband and immediately the people of that locality constructed a *sati* temple for her. A belief runs that worshipping *sati* results in a lot of virtue to the devotee. *Raja Isalu* and *Ramji Huna Sati* are two such epics, which provide the audience with a different worldview. In one of the Banjara epics placed in this volume, the system of child marriage is narrated and the hero could marry the bride whom he had been engaged to during his childhood. Child marriage was found among many castes and tribes of India. Even the castes and tribes of Kalahandi practised child marriage in which the bride was of 16 to 19 years and the groom was of 12 to 13 years.

The Gaurs belong to the caste group and the culture and language of the Gond and the Gaurs is similar due to their coexistence in the district. (*Gonde Gohurekar Desh* which means 'the land is of the Gonds and the Guads'.)

II. Epic Characters

The characters of the epics, as revealed from the text are drawn from all sections. They are gods and goddesses, human and characters from nether region. Some of them in the oral epics are mentioned here.

a. Gods and Goddesses

Gods and goddesses in the cultural practice of Kalahandi are found as follows:

i. Supreme god and goddesses
ii. Ancestor spirit
iii. Tutelary deities (village gods and goddesses) and
iv. Evil spirit.

The first three types of gods and goddesses help the hero and heroine, but the last one is malevolent, and captures human beings to get her/his desire satisfied.

The function of gods and goddesses of the above categories (except the evil spirit) is to support the epic characters and sometimes control the events.

1. Gods and goddesses are supreme beings and from them emerged the first progenitor and from them took birth many species; one among them was human.
2. Gods and goddesses help the hero in disaster. In some cases they bring up the hero.
3. God wanted to take human form to enjoy human life.
4. God created the universe and started cultivation for his subjects.
5. Gods and goddesses have their clan and kinship relation in the light of the human clan and their kinship relation. Thus the clan distributes the gods and goddesses among the brothers while distributing the lands among the family.
6. All magical support is bestowed on the hero or heroine through gods and goddesses (magical wand, magical sword, flying horse, etc.).
7. Role of clan god *(duma)* is more important in supporting the clan from all dangers, but some times when the clan head forgets to worship the god, he is punished by the clan god and after worship he regains his status. Most of the Gaur epics are based on this value.
8. Seven sisters of water fairies or forest maiden have appeared in the epics and have become heroines.

b. Birds and Animals

Birds and animals are supporting characters to the hero and heroine. They are animals such as parrot, deer, buffalo, bullock, bull, sheep, crow, jackal, tiger, lion, boar, and many more. The occupational caste group such as the Gaur has the cow, bulls, and bullocks as the soldiers in the battle. A one-eyed buffalo has helped the hero (Gaur epic *Madhab-Rupmati*) like an old man or a faithful wellwisher. In the Banjara epics, bullocks and buffaloes are important animals that help the hero. Parrot as message-giver and deer as a helper to the hero appeared in the Banjara epic (*King Isalu*). The serpent is always compared to a lusty man who indulges with somebody's wife. It is also helpful to the hero in offering him help (Bhunjia epic *Tulsiveer*). In some cases, tiger, horse,

and serpent endowed with magical powers support the hero and heroine. Animals are portrayed in the light of human characters. They immensely help the hero and heroine in achieving their goal.

c. Hero, Heroine and Others

i. Epic Hero

On the basis of the religious worldview and social values, the ethnic singer creates culture heroes in their mind. There is a pattern of identifying a hero in a particular community. This is based on using the natural resources, discovery, invention, talent, and strength of the hero. After attending many tests, the hero wins and becomes the role model for the community. Conflict in family for land and property are two major factors in creating a culture hero.

Universal heroes, whether in oral or written or performance, always have some supernatural powers to resolve human problems which ordinary people cannot solve. A hero, in the social memory of Kalahandi, is endowed with many supernatural powers. Initially humiliated, he becomes the most powerful man and takes revenge against those who antagonized him. But the hero is not a selfish man. He is dedicated and daring, and shoulders social responsibilities to overcome any kind of danger that confronts him. The hero is always tested repeatedly. It is through the hero that human helplessness is solved. The leaders resolve the dynamics of social conflict across time. Virtues and glory are attributed to the hero. The hero is never defeated.

Therefore, the social ethics is manifested in the events and deeds of the hero. So, he is alive in the memory of the people. While the mythical hero becomes god and finds place in ritual worship thereby connecting the past with the present, socio-historical heroes glorify the community through their social actions. This attaches new socio-political order. Whether it is past or present, ethnicity has played its role in achieving power. Therefore, we come across the conflict in the life of a hero, which is ultimately resolved and the virtue is respected.

The heroes in the epics of Kalahandi bear some common characteristics such as

1. Birth of a Hero: A pregnant woman (usually queen or wife of the tribal chief), after her husband dies in the war fleas the kingdom. She is found alone in the forest and a tribal chief/sage/Brahmin discovers her. She is offered shelter and there she gives birth to a boy who subsequently becomes the hero. Sometimes he becomes the king.
2. Signs of a future king from childhood: While the hero is sleeping under a tree, a snake provides shade for his face from the sun, others discover it and declare that the boy has the signs of a king (*rajkala*).
3. Blessings of clan goddess make the hero supernatural: The hero becomes powerful after worshipping the clan goddess. Sometimes the clan goddess brings up the hero (hero also performs ancestor worship).
4. Tribal chief searches for a hero of Kshatriya status to make him their king.

5. The fortune of the hero or heroine is spelt out by the astrologer.
6. Birth of a hero is accompanied with many miracles.
7. Most of the divine heroes took their birth through other means and not from a human womb.
8. Hero is sometimes an orphan because he takes birth after his father's death.
9. Hero is faithful to his heroine, but sometimes, the heroine is unfaithful.
10. Hero solves the people's problems (by killing a tiger, taming a tiger, killing a demon, or serpent) and promotes beneficial deeds.
11. Hero is inventor of many new things (iron, iron melting machine, preparation of liquor, medicine, occupational techniques).
12. Marriage outside the clan (Gonds with Dhurua Kin, Bhunjia with Halwa/ Gond kin).
13. Extraordinary deeds (getting rain, making the cultivation possible, providing food to cattle in a small pot, etc.)
14. Idealized character traits (honest, truthful, cooperative, hard working).
15. Represents ethnic culture and is an expert in occupational work.
16. Legend and myths are created in his name (Kachhra Dhurua, Budharaja etc).
17. Has political importance (role model in tradition; transforms into a role model in modern politics: (Gaur) *Kharatmal* epic or (Gond) Budharaja).
18. Hero as a dedicated lover, ready to die for the heroine, hero in disguise to meet the heroine, becomes bride servant.
19. Younger brother becomes the hero in oral epics.
20. Regains his lost power.

ii. Heroine

1. Heroine is helpful to the hero in war (*Chital Singh Chhatri*).
2. Chaste wife (Ramela, Kamala Sati).
3. Symbol of piety, justice and non-violence (Kharatmal).
4. Heroine is dedicated to her husband and becomes sati (Banjara epics).
5. Ungrateful wife (a story in *King Isalu* and epic of *Tulsiveer*).
6. Heroine faces fire ordeal to prove her chastity (Ramela).
7. Clever heroine (*Hiro Diwani*, Banjara epic).
8. Heroine is of human origin, sometimes divine but not to marry any person from the earth to maintain her purity.
9. Heroine leaves her parents for the hero's sake.
10. Heroine with magical power (Ramela).

11. Heroine with chastity is more powerful than the mendicants (Banjara).
12. Heroine saves the hero.
13. Mythical heroine is deified after her death (Gurumai, Kondhen).
14. Local heroines have relationships with heroes from outside.
15. Human heroines become goddesses because of their good deeds (*Sunadi).*

iii. Others

1. The village headman and his wife.
2. Sage and *yogi* (both good and bad).
3. Tribal chief (shelter giver for heroine).
4. Demigods and goddesses.
5. Ancestor's spirit.
6. Astrologers and yogis.
7. Ploughmen/cowherd-boys.
8. Soldiers.
9. Washerman and washerwoman.

III. Epic Landscape: Nature, Space, and Time

It is the land, flora, and fauna that shape the culture of mankind. Human ecology in the traditional society is not isolated from nature. Ecology in Kalahandi is the combination of nature, animal, and human beings and the worldview and belief attached to the landscape. The culture of Kalahandi can be perceived from nature, space, and time.

From the evolution point of view forest is the mother of all culture. Kalahandi, once known as *Mahakantara* (great forest), from time immemorial, has formed the foundation of culture. This is evident from the oral epics in which forest occupies an important role in shaping human culture.

Nature as Creator of Culture

In Kalahandi, the forest is the creator of worldview among the communities which have shared their ecology as a sign of belongingness. Forest is the abode of all gods and goddesses. Forest determined the socio-economic condition of the people for their survival and the symbiotic relationship was established. Accordingly the land was identified with the community. It is mentioned that the Gonds and the Kondhs initiated the human habitation after cleaning the forest. Coexistence of man, nature, and spirit is found integrated in the socio-cultural life of these communities. Forest and mountains are worshipped as the living entity. We may come across many forests and mountains in the romantic epics which reveals that

1. Name of the forests (12 kinds of forest in Kondh epic, *Ujjal Khed* in Banjara epic, *Kadli Jharia* in Gond epic, *Lori/goth* as the nearby forest in Gaur epic.

2. Name of the mountains: Bhunjia epic.
3. Hunters and food gatherers have their own hunting territories in which they do not allow others to hunt. This convention is maintained by them, which the outsiders do not know. The forest department has recorded these names and accordingly categorized the forests.
4. Each forest is identified with as a specific tribal group's habitat. (Sunabeda forest for Bhunjia, *Katpar* jungle for the Kamar, *pahilpaar* forest for the Kondhs, *Khadupani* for the Gonds, *Lanjigarh* for the Kondhs, *Ampani* jungle for Gond *Budha Raja* etc.)
5. The most primitive tribes like to stay in isolation and maintain their ethnic solidarity (Kamar, Bhunjia).
6. Outsiders are not allowed to sit in their homes. If they touch their kitchen, they burn the kitchen, purify the place, and build a new hut (Bhunjia).
7. Forest is the abode of many gods and goddesses. Each mountain and each river in the forest has a name and an invisible family tree, which the priests of the locality can explain.
8. Gods /goddess of forest is worshipped by the local tribes.
9. Rivers are worshipped as goddesses *(Sunadi, Indradi and Sindradi).*
10. Animals and birds coexist in their day-to-day life. Birds and monkeys destroy the fields of tribal people, so they drive them out by playing music. They catch boars and forest pigs.
11. The forest is the abode of the sacred world where both animate and inanimate has divine powers.
12. In the primitive community, human beings turn into gods and goddesses after death and stay in the forest as ancestor spirits.
13. Before the clan-based land was identified, there were clan-based territories *(Gandhu Paradhia,* Kamar epic, *Kachhra Dhurua, Bhunjia* epic).
14. All mountains are male gods and all rivers are female goddesses.

Space

Ecology in Kalahandi has given ample opportunity for interdependence between man and nature on the one hand, and realizing the supernatural in both man and nature, on the other. Space in Kalahandi may be divided into mountains, forests, agricultural fields, open fields, and the village. The space of the village is also attributed to the castes and tribes living together and sharing the natural resources. While the primitive tribes constitute a homogenous social group identified in a given land and forest, the majority of tribal groups have the history of local migration. Interestingly, epics in Kalahandi bear the history of human settlement through establishing a village. Conflict between the Gonds and the Kondhs was for the land and that was resolved with the proof they

produced. In course of time the conflict was resolved and more than one ethnic group settled down in the village. Therefore, villages are heterogeneous; majority of them are tribes having ownership over the land, priesthood and administration, and others are occupation groups. But while sharing agricultural occupation, they constitute a group sharing the labour irrespective of castes and tribes.

The space of the village, therefore, represents a composite culture. Settlement of different caste groups in the village distributing the land according to the caste status signifies the social structure of the village. Tribal villages have their *gudi* in the middle of the village, nearer to the hut is the house of the priest, and then the occupation groups serving the village are settled. The *grampati* is placed at the end of the village to safeguard the habitation. In *the Lakshmi Janam* epic, this is discussed in detail.

The sacred grove, *Aam Burai, Kadli Kachhar, Gai Goth, Sati pond,* agricultural field *(Sunabeda and Rupabeda jamin*), and goddess other than village deities and *duma* specified in some tree is defined in terms of sharing a space for the human beings (both living and dead), animals, and gods and goddesses. Thus the land, after human settlement, becomes sacred and profane and the nature becomes culture.

Cultural attitude of the Kamars about the village, and the Bhunjia about the purity of space is another important aspect. While the Gonds, Kondhs, and Banjara allow outsiders to sit in their homes and show hospitality, the Bhunjia and Kamar do not allow outsiders to share their space (but interestingly, the outsider has become the hero of their myths and epics, for example. *Sunadi* epic, birth of Budharaja and Bhima in Bhunjia epic). Bhunjia tribe do not allow any outsider to sit on their floor. They also do not allow their own married daughters to touch their kitchens. If anybody touches the kitchen, they burn the kitchen and construct a new hut. They also replace the soil where the outsider sat. This is still in practice among the Bhunjia. The whole Sunabeda plateau is considered as the abode of Bhunjia. As said earlier, *Bhunjiekar devta-* means the god is owned by Bhunjia, the territory is also considered the land of the Bhunjias. The Bhunjia myth thus validates the territory of different gods and goddesses. Distribution of power, land, and gods and goddesses go together.

Kamar tribe is a small community of about 3000 people found only in the forest of Sunabeda and Katpar-Purubadi hill range. They are nomadic and depend on hunting and fishing and melting of iron. More than five to ten families form a band. They shift their settlement from one place to another depending on the availability of hunt and water. While they migrate from one settlement to the other, all of them burn their huts. They believe that if they leave the huts un-burnt, the evil spirits and the ghosts will take shelter there and hurt them in future. Once they leave a place, they do not return there. The burnt huts are found abandoned with wooden logs, and others don't even touch or take the half burnt wooden log as firewood.

People who have already adopted agriculture have also adopted the puranic worldview and consider the earth as a sacred place. Therefore, earth is their direct goddess. But in both tribal and non-tribal society, those who have adopted agriculture

as their main source of living have shared the common belief of propitiating nature. Therefore, some Brahmins in Kalahandi who have settled in tribal villages sacrifice cock and hen during agricultural festivals. Tribal predominance is found in maintaining the tradition and rituals, and non-tribal take part in the cultural ceremonies. In *Toki parab* festival (sacrifice of a virgin girl before the earth goddess in Kalahandi) the Kondh paraja tribe celebrate it for seven days, and last three days, every one joins there.

The concept of *tribhuvana* (three spaces namely *swarga* - heaven, *Martya*- earth, *Patala* - underworld) is found in the mythic thought. The ancestor spirit, among the tribal, does not have the concept of going to heaven after death. Instead, ancestor spirits stay in the kitchen or in a tree specified for him/her in the nearby forest.

Forests are also of two types. One is the forest close to the village and agriculture field, and another is the forest far off from the village. Forests near the village are also important in contributing for both the living and the dead. The animals of the village also have *adar* where the cattle are kept during day time, and some time at night. But,according to the priests, deep and dense forest far off from the villages are always sacred and only gods and goddesses live there.

Village

Village constitutes the centre of human habitation. Distribution of space is determined with the settlement of different castes and tribes. *Sadargudi – the* centre place of the village is offered to the goddess for worship among the Kondhs. Some tribes have their village *gudi* at the end of the village. The village is surrounded by *mahul* tree or mango tree, but it is close to the agricultural field and uncultivable land. In plain areas - *sagar* are available. But in scattered tribal habitations, water scarcity is a major problem.

Urban Centres

Capitals and palaces dominate the narratives as though there are two big palaces in Kalahandi. One is of the Naga dynasty and the other is of the Chauhans. Besides there are small Zamindaries with small palaces that were the ideal model of the singers and story tellers to imagine the kings, queens,prince and palaces. Power centres are always the centre of exploitations. Rural people are always afraid of the urban people as mentioned in some of the epics.

A milkmaid from a village goes to the nearby town to sell milk or curd. A tribal woman goes to nearby town to sell her fire wood to purchase rice with the money. Forest products are sold in the town. Tribal people depend on the towns for salt and colthes. Urban people and agriculture society depend on tribal and occupation group for their agricultural and household appliance. Thus interdependence is found in the economy of Kalahandi. Urban population in Kalahandi is 6 percent and rural population is 96 percent.

The rural-urban dichotomy is found in the sub-culture of Indian society. Till now, the towns have been the reference group for the economic control of the rural and forest people. Urban people or people from the capital are portrayed as powerful and

clever under the shelter of the ruler. Sometimes when urban people fail to solve the nation's problems, heroes from rural areas have solved the problems. Capital and palace have been portrayed as the centre of treachery and inhumane activities.

Time:

The calendar year of Kalahandi may broadly be divided into four main seasons: summer, rainy, winter, and spring. People use local names for the months. Every 15 days in the village is called *pandri*. The whole year is divided into two parts. Part one is from June to December, which is suitable for cultivation. For cultivation, the people completely depend on rainwater. People preserve the rainwater from July to October in the *Sagar, Munda and Bandh* (three types of ponds: Sagar is a huge pond occupying hundred acres of land, *Munda* is smaller than *Sagar*, the smallest one is *Bandh*). The water is stored will be used in summer. Therefore, traditional water conservation was adopted in many villages.

Dependent on rainwater, farmers of Kalahandi practice paddy as a single-crop cultivation. Therefore, the first half of the year, that is January to June, is devoted to the preparation of soil, field, and similar occupational tasks that are supportive to cultivation. From June to December they are engaged in agriculture or agricultural labour. June to December is also divided into two parts: June to September in which the small paddy (*san dhan)* is harvested. This paddy is sown during May and the harvest is in September. The total period of the cultivation of small paddy is two to three months. The poor and small farmers reap small paddy and eat new rice during the new-rice eating ceremony which falls in September (*Nuakhai)*. But the big paddy (*Bada dhan)* takes more than four months. So by the end of December, the farmers harvest the paddy. The small farmers and the wage labourers work in the house of big farmers for wage after September.

After reaping big paddy, the farmers and the wage labourers are comparatively free. Therefore, they work in the fields. Irregular rain and failure of crops lead to repeated drought and poverty, and a majority of people fall prey to the loss. Therefore, from January to May, many wage labourers go to neighbouring states to earn their livelihood. From January to June most of the people depend on forest products such as collecting *kendu* leaf, and firewood, and adopt many local occupations such as making bricks, constructing houses, carpentry, earth work, levelling the land, digging pond or well, etc.

The calender year of Kalahandi is thus traditionally regulated by the life of majority of people who are rural and forest dwellers. The farmers and the wage labourers and the forest dwellers plan their economic life depending on seasonal products.

Daily Life

A day is divided into eight *prahars*. Each *prahar* represents roughly three hours.

Kukradaka (calling of cock early in the morning), *haldhila* (untying of bullocks in the morning), *maidhan* (noon), *adhu bel* (afternoon), *belbuda* (evening), *raet* (night), *adharat* (midnight), and *Chibirakuta bel* (husking of perched rice that is done around 3 A.M.)

are the eight *praharas* in a day. Each time is signified by an event. They also have a specification of time for men and women according to their occupation.

A rural or forest woman goes to the forest early in the morning with an axe and collects firewood and comes back by noon. After that, she brushes her teeth. She takes her bathe on her way back to home. Due to lack of wearing clothes,she dries her half of the cloth and waits till it is dried.Then she changes her next half of the cloth and dries it and come back to home. Evening is the time for the sale of forest products and purchase of oil and salt. Small towns and block headquarters are the reference groups for the rural and forest people of Kalahandi in terms of economic exchange.

It is the time, which determines the economic activity of the people. Cyclic repetition of time in a year regulates the culture and customs of the people of Kalahandi. Therefore, unless a mango is offered to the village goddess it is not plucked or consumed. Many agricultural festivals, such as rites of passage, repeat in the life cycle of the people.

Time is also fixed for the worship of gods and goddesses, so are the fairs and festivals. Thus, time for human and time for the divine carry meaning in different contexts. While the time for human being is flexible, time of the gods and goddesses is rigid. For instance, the festival *semiyatra-* (eating of new bean by the Kondhs) is fixed for a particular god or goddess to be worshipped on a fixed day of the year and it is not changed in under any circumstance.

The concept of time in the narratives bears the context and meaning. It is evident from the events of the epic.Time is perceived as the repetition of a function like the repetition of harvest. Repetition of the annual calendar is very common, but there are some cases such as buffalo sacrifice which takes place in a village once in every 12 years.

Coexistence of time

Each epic has its own space and time. But in oral epics this has been interwoven into a particular time when the characters of two different epics are visible to the singer in a single point of time. The episode of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* is found in another context where the epic hero is able to see the characters of different times in one space. In a Gaur epic (even in any epic where the hero is flying on a magical horse), the hero can see the battle of Pandavas and Kauravas fighting a battle in the Kurukshetra, and after a while he can witness Hanuman and Bharata embracing each other. At the same moment, the folk hero sees both, the episodes of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and again he come back to his own topic to lead the story. The timelessness of events, or combining two episodes of different times into a point of time, is the creation of the epic singer.

IV. Epics in Context

Epics in Kalahandi are found in ritual and social contexts. Ritual context is complex and esoteric. So, the text which is recited in the ritual context covers the important

aspect of the ritual. Without a ritual context, understanding the sacred text/myth is a task. Ritual and myth are a tradition-bound act. The unspoken convention in the form of symbolic object which has function and meaning through symbols. These symbols helps the myths to make understand a particular character or an event from its context. So the symbolic objects in the ritual place, the unspoken convention, and the spoken words, all these form the whole gamut of text rather than the oral text alone. When myths are sacred ,the epic characters are not.But it is found that the epic characters are influenced by the personality of the mythic character. This is because the epic hero is embedded with many a supernatural power.The singer makes his epic hero compatible with the mythic hero.Therefore, in Gond Budharaja, the first worshipper of Lingaa deo is portrayed as mythic hero. His ideal model is reflected in other culture heroes like Chital Singh Chhatri, or Hirakhan Chhatri.

Referring to the African ethnic epics, Mulokozi says[16],

> *The term 'context' embraces two situations: the socio-historical context and the performance context. The performance context, which gives us the performance characteristics of epic changes with every performance, while the socio-historical context is relatively more stable. The socio-historical context embraces the historical and geographical setting of the story, which may be remote in time, as well as the successive contexts that have influenced and reshaped the particular epic in varying epochs up to the present time.*

Considering the above findings of Mulokozi, if we observe the epics in Kalahandi, we come across the same experience as that of African ethnic epics, which equally suits the Indian epic situation. The context of the epics in the Indian view is broadly mythical and historical. While mythical epics are associated with rituals and religious functions, historical epics are linked with the social and cultural heroes. Therefore, historical legends become epics in an Indian situation. Even though common people consider *Mahabharata* as a great epic, scholars define it as *itihasa* or history.

For Mulokozi, even the context is constructed in the mental level and tradition, which is archaic and historical. Lauri Honko calls this as tradition-bound epics. This is related to past, and performance context is associated with the present.

The two levels of context thus generate the epic composition, which is mapped by Mulokozi as follows.[17]

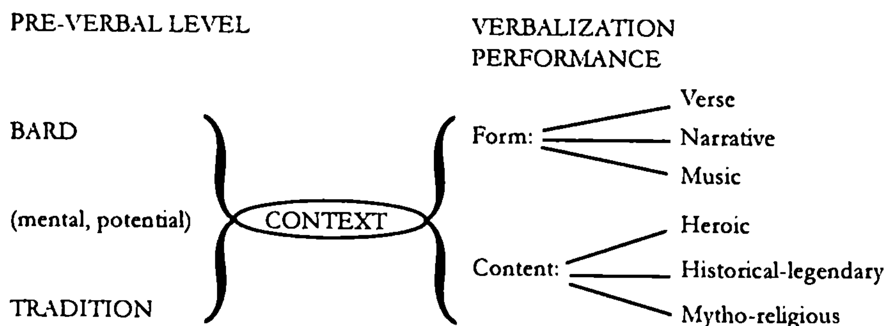


Figure 1: *Generation of the oral epic*

On the basis of the available texts, we may infer the kind of contexts of the epics. Broadly, it is ritual context (mythic) and performance context (social).

i. Ritual context:

Ritual context is the extension of the 'text in performance' with social function and divine sanction. Singing of mythical epics is a part of ritual performance. The text alone is not as meaningful as it is understood from it's ritual context. Mythical epics are considered as covert fabulous layer.

'Mythic epic has no human layer and its protagonists,' says Jason.[18] 'Usually all deities and demons or monsters'. She further says, mythic epic tells about struggles and wars between deities, the result of struggle is the creation of the world and its order. The struggle is between the 'good' and the 'evil' on a general level.[19]

Each epic presented in this volume represents an ethnic culture. The inter-ethnic relation is also one of the important aspects, which shares the cultural commonalities among the communities that share geography. Tribal people of Kalahandi share the mythical epics. When the sacred narratives are used in the religious function, other castes also participate. There are two spaces for this. The worship place is a private domain for the particular tribal priest that observes it and a public domain for the audience who take part and enjoy the festival.

For instance, buffalo sacrifice is a grand ritual that falls once in 12 years. The Kondh priest prepares for the festival for one year before the actual buffalo sacrifice takes place. Many people, irrespective of castes and tribes attend the festival to observe the sacrificing of the buffalo. But the ritual place is strictly prohibited to other castes.

The ritual context of the sacred centres and the sacred narratives are important in the sense of understanding the symbolic representation of the priest and the singers. The tradition-bound rituals and their repetition of calendar activities strengthen the ethnic group to maintain their religious purity. The Kondh priest recites a three-line *mantra* which signifies the repetition of vegetation[20] in calendar years, so is the repetition of life.

Oh mother,
Kandul tree has sprouted flowers
The *Kandul* flower comes once in a year
Life also comes once.
Bless us, we are
Yours sons and daughters.

It is believed that as how life comes once into the body, festivals come once in a year, and *kandul* tree (a kind of pulse) blossoms with flowers once in a year. So why not celebrate life like celebrating the festival which appears like a flower in a tree. This signifies their repetitions of 'rites of passage' the cycle of seasons, cycles of cultivation,

cycles of dance and music – all integrated in the symbol of rites and rituals. Religion plays a prominent role in the life of the people of Kalahandi. The supreme gods, the ancestor spirits, and the tutelary deities take part in the myths and ritual performance. They are present either in a person in form of a spirit possessed in a human being or are animated in a symbol (stone, wooden log).

The ritual context of buffalo sacrifice is a complex one which needs one year of preparation. One month prior to the performance, intense activities go on in the Kondh village. The time is during December–January. Similarly, *Lakshmi puja* ritual and performance has its own time and space. The month of *Margasira* (January) and the five Thursdays are dedicated to Goddess *Lakshmi* – the goddess of wealth. *Bhima Bibu* – marriage ritual of Bhima with Kondhen is another seven-day ritual which is organized by the Bhunjia and the Kondhs, and this is observed in the month of September-October when the scarcity of rain is felt by the cultivators.

Sunadi Yatra festival is observed by the Bhunjias in Sunabeda plateau in the month of October. The creation myth is symbolically represented in the complex ritual process in which the singing of creation myth by the priests and Gurumai is a part.

The Kamars have their *Baddevtar Khena* and *Linga Bharat* which is again a long narrative song related to the creation of gods and goddesses, their marriage with deities, distribution of territories among the deities, and distribution of *Jhankar* and *Dihari* and their actions and affiliation with the a particular caste/tribe and region.

The ancestor spirit plays a major role (of course invisible) in safeguarding the well being of the concerned clan. Therefore, the clan gods and goddesses are also the main protagonists in the myths and epics. They help their clans in times of disaster. The clansman also worships the deities in all their rites of passage and calenderic religious occasions. They even fight the evil spirits and save their descendants. The deceased person of the clan becomes a deity and is called *Duma*.

The village tutelary deities safeguard the villagers. They are both male and female deities. They have different roles to play. The *Janam Khand Puran* sung by the Debgunias has the functions of different gods and goddesses in the village. While the Gangadi is the earth goddess, Thakurani is the goddess of smallpox, Bhima *is* the rain god, and Gabdasani is the deity for eradicating diseases and disaster. *Grampati* is the male god like the village chief. The social organization of the village is symbolically represented in the village *gudi*, which regulates the village social rules common for all the castes and tribes. The villagers believe in forest gods and goddesses and worship them. They believe that unless the forest goddess is appeased they cannot get a hunt.

The ritual context of Kalahandi is thus based on the following:

1. Family/clan ritual (rites of passage, birth, pre-puberty rites, marriage, death rituals)
2. Caste ritual (worship of clan gods and goddesses)
3. Village ritual (Agricultural rituals and propitiation of gods and goddesses)
4. Forest gods ritual (conducted periodically)

5. Regional festival (Spring festival, Dashara, Holi etc)
6. The ritual and festival context thus, is based on family, society, and region. In each case, presence of oral performance in the form of myth, epics, *Purja* (caste genealogies) and eulogy are recited.

Supernaturalism

Belief and religion make the epic character and events more acceptable to the community. People believe in supernaturalism. Therefore, belief in ancestor spirit, magic, divination, deification,occult, knowledge, sacrifice, and shamanism are found in the epics, irrespective of it's mythical, or historical, or social context. People believe in many gods and goddesses. There are hundreds of gods and goddesses in Kalahandi. These are local /village gods and goddesses. The reason for creating such a large number of gods and goddesses is also not accidental. It was a part of a social system in which land, language, power, territory, clan, forest, kin group, caste-friendly communities, and the gods and goddesses would stay together. Everyday there are many unsolved problems that occur in the family or in the village. There are also natural calamities. Human ecology does not refer to nature and the inanimate only, but the invisible universe also that ties the human ecological system with the social system and also with the ideological system. This ideological system gives birth to many supernatural beliefs which is beyond understanding and logic, but based on strong social beliefs. Even the priests of the tribal community cannot answer some questions.

Human Sacrifice

Similar situations have occurred in the events in the epics. The epic characters, either mythical, or heroic, or historical are not free from supernatural beliefs. Sacrifice is one indicator of such a belief. Sacrificing the enemy before the clan god was mandatory. The hero offered the recently married woman to propitiate his goddess (*Chilal Singh Chhatri*, Gond epic). Uncles sacrificed their nephew for breaking social rules. Winners sacrificed their enemies, and younger brothers sacrificed their elder brothers.

In the Bhunjia epic, it is mentioned that, when Tulsi, the epic hero died, the pond filled with water. The heroine of the Banjara epics sacrificed her life for her deceased husband. *Meriah* was the religious practice among the Kondhs who were sacrificing human beings during eighteenth century.

These sacrifices in different context of the epics are based on the worldview that the community had developed in relation to their nature and beyond their nature. Therefore to understand the world beyond them, they take the help of priests and shamans *(sira)*. They solve the human problem through occult. Spirit of gods and goddesses appear in the body of the shaman.

Magic

People want to solve the problems of natural calamity through worship: they worship the rain god for rain, the earth mother goddess for ample harvest, *Thakurani Mata* to get

rid of small pox. Even today, a malaria patient without understanding the symptoms of fever, believes that some evil spirit has possessed him.

Another important aspect of an epic character is ancestor spirit. They watch the clan and save them from danger through omens and signs. In the Gaur epic *Kotrabaina Ramela*, the ancestor spirits obstruct the heroine Ramela from going to Bendul city. They obstructed her on the way in the form of a bear, tiger, bison, etc., but it did not bother her. Miracle is the attractive device of any narrative to make the story more interesting. A myth is always shown to have miracles for its symbolic representation and so are the epics. After being propitiated, gods and goddess offer the hero with a magical horse, magical sword, magical dress, magical dice, etc., through which they win the enemies and overcome obstacles.

Magic and supernaturalism in the epics of Kalahandi can be seen in instances of:

1. Forest maiden getting back the life of the hero.
2. Human sacrificed to get water in the pond.
3. Talking animals and birds.
4. Turning the hero into a fly, or horse, or ash.
5. Magical horse, magical dice.
6. Occupational spoon[21] as magical wand.
7. Gods and goddesses descending through golden and silver strings.
8. Diamond deer as the instrument of revenge for the hero.
9. Woman being turned into a fig tree.
10. Generals/soldiers turning into stone images.
11. Dead persons get back their life etc.

II. Epics in Social Context

The performance is a dialogue between the bard and his performance context, including the audience, the music, language, and verbal and personal expressions.

The social context of oral performance is less religious and more social, directly connected to the people and therefore, flexible. The public performance is limited to a community or a part of a community. In the evening, after the worship of the *Vana* (the caste symbol), the singer starts singing the narratives to the audience. The audience consists of all members irrespective of age and sex. The common feature of the performance is that any one who likes to listen to the epic/tales and narrative is free to participate.

In the villages of Kalahandi, people enjoy their leisure time after lunch and dinner. The post-lunch session is mainly spent on congregation in a common place in the village. If some singers have arrived at somebody's house, then a gathering takes place. But that time is spent on making creative stories and riddling, creating different kinds

of tunes using the fiddle / or even orally following the tone of birds and animals. This is done mainly for the children. Even the singer's wife tattoos the girls and boys those who are interested in writing a symbol or putting their names on their forehand. Some girls tattoo their body, allowing to pierce the nail on their bodies, tolerating the pain, and bearing the spouting of blood from their skin. Another act is the preparation of beads. The girls are made to learn how to prepare different kinds of beads. The wife of the singer also pierces ears and noses during that day. So the purpose of the visit is a completely cultural one, not only to sing the song or caste genealogies, but also to help in many activities the patron wants to have.

In the evening, the patron (clan master who provides shelter to his clan singer) invites the village people to assemble in his house where the singer performs the myths or the epics. Other people also take part as listeners. Other castes living with the Gonds and Kondhs may also take part in the performance. But if the performance is the recitation of caste genealogies, they do not allow others to listen. But when non-religious texts such as epic singing or story-telling session go on, all are allowed to listen and take part. But very often, the seniors take part in the discussion during the performance. If the singer is a senior, then he is respected. But in case of middle-aged singers, the seniors listen, and when the singer fails to maintain the chronology of the story they interfere and correct the latter.

There are four contexts of performance-singing among the Gonds and the Kondhs

1. Afternoon (post-lunch) session: for all,
2. Early night: mythical narratives/Puran/ancestors story: family and clan members,
3. Special Ritual Occasion: Caste genealogies (Only senior persons of the clan are allowed. Women are also not allowed to attend, except to take part in ritual arrangements),
4. Invocation of ancestor spirit (singing the life history of the ancestor spirit)

Performer -Audience Relation

Barring the mythical singing which is a long story and except the priests and seniors, nobody wants to listen to what the singers/priests are singing, other narrations are favourites among the women and youth of the village. They listen to the story, maintaining a distance from the seniors to respect them and enjoy the epic performance. Everybody believes the story. The singer tries to connect the story with the commentary during the recitation and evoke the community to keep up the glory.

The singer, if encouraged, sings the best of his cultural pieces, or else he refuses to sing. In some cases, some patrons do not like the singers to sing and just allow them to enjoy the hospitality. In such a case, they do not take keen interest in singing the songs and epics, but utter their dissatisfaction and urge that owing to their patron's apathy, they are gradually losing their profession. But they cannot sing if the audience are not

prepared to listen. Therefore, even if the singers are available in the Gond/Kondh village, the performance does not take place.

It is not the singer community alone that sings the epics and stories. There are some enthusiastic persons from the community and they are excellent bearers of culture. They know the pulse of the local culture. Their intention is to be recognized as a singer by the community, especially during the marriage ceremony. The songs they sing are six-to-eight-lined songs. But they also try to learn the long narrative epics by listening to the ethnic singers.

Performance was a part of entertainment in the traditional society. When the singer community came to the clan master's village, everyone discussed his arrival. Children were curious to listen to the fiddle. Seniors were encouraged to share the clan history and legends of the past. But with the changing scenario, it is very difficult to infer if the epic song or the myths would play their role.

Although it is hard truth, the epic singers are now discouraged and playing the music and presenting the distorted form of myths and epics are only to preserve the tradition. Therefore, the most senior persons and most senior singers of the community only can interact on their culture. However, the relation between the singers and the senior audience is very cordial, because the singers bear the symbol of their caste genealogies and myths, as well as promote their social glory.

V. Texture

Epic is a narrative form in which the singer communicates the content with purpose and meaning. The device of communicating the epic is verbal, instrumental, and total physical response. This is again helpful in strengthening the verbal performance. According to Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, communication is a form of story telling and narration as a symbolic action. The words deal with sequence and meaning and performance is always a meaningful communication (www. wikipedia.com).

i. Language of the Singers:

Oral epic is distinguished from literary epics. When narrated, it has oral formulas in tradition-bound language with metrical condition to express a given essential idea (Oinas, 1972:101-107).[22] The epic formula consists of detailed description of actions, ornamental adjectives, simile and repetitions. The repetitions may be frame repetitions and nucleus repetition. The style of recitation is another aspect of formulating the texture of the epic. As it is accompanied by musical instruments and leads from an imaginary verbal world to a visual world, it creates an illusion. According to Oinas, all music and epics are chanted and have a magical influence to take the audience to another world (Oinas, 1972:101-109).[23]

The language used for expression is close to the spoken language. But it is something more than the spoken language, rather imaginary and tradition-bound generative language, the meaning of which is unintelligible to the common people when

asked, but have relevance in the epic expression; may be these are individual building blocks shaped in the mental text of the singer, to communicate the verbal and non-verbal communications through many symbols and signs to construct meaning from the culture. Thus the rationality of the epic is validated and accepted by the community as credible. Also this, the sequence of events arranged in the epic content and the symbolic language used in the narration takes the audience to an illusionary world, but the events in the epics make sense in real-world terms. This helps the epics to establish the values, knowledge, experience, and worldview of the community.

The language of the singer is as simple as the spoken language, but the signs and symbols are laden with cultural metaphors. A beautiful girl is compared to a grain of white rice (the girl is made in one grain of rice) or a coriander (the girl is shaped like a coriander).

But in case of caste genealogies, the language is esoteric. The Gond *Purja*'s content is esoteric in nature. For instance, a paragraph of the Gond *Purja* may be taken:

There are eight clan *(saga)* Gonds.

They are Makam, Netam, Morhei, Oti, Neti, Porti, Jagat and Sori,

The great three brothers of Gonds are Markam, Netam and Morhei.

Oti Gond took his birth from the carpenter's workshop. Neti Gond took his birth from *marwadi sertula.* Neti Gond took his birth from the urine of the Pathans.

Porti Gond took his birth from the black serpent. Original Porti is Brahmin. Jagat Gond took his birth from the jungle flowers, and they are barbers.

White tiger cub is *Sori*, Panka (untouchable) caste.

Milk sea Markam, got cow milk and cooked porridge.

Jagat went to get a spoon.

Sori put three stones for an oven (*kara* stone, *kulthia* stone, and makdia stone). Oti Gond brought firewood and Neti cooked rice.

The above paragraph signifies that Gonds are divided into eight clans and the Markam is the great Gond clan. Even though they all are Gonds, their status that is described in the *Purja* is esoteric and symbolic.

The Gond headman, himself was unable to clarify the symbols. Because the whole *Purja* is full of symbols and mythical characters. Therefore purja are only explained and interpreted by the elders.

The meaning of above Purja may be: Markam (mango), Netam (dog), and Morhei (peacock) are the three superior clans among the Gonds. The remaining five clans are inferior. Status of Oti is a carpenter. Neti Gond is a servant (like a servant who measures paddy in the shop of a Marwari - a North-Indian businessman found in Kalahandi).

Origin of Neti Gond from the urine of the Pathan is not understood because the Gonds were sworn enemies of the Pathans. May be the Netis have joined hands with

the Pathans violating the group solidarity, so they have been branded as Pathan's son. This is an abusive term to use against those who violate the social rules.

Taking birth from the black serpent is another symbol, which resembles with the origin myth of the Naga kings of Chhotanagpur and Kalahandi. Black serpent is a male, who copulated with a Brahmin woman and got a child who became Phanik Mukut Ray - the first Naga hero of Chhotanagpur. This signifies that the status of Porti Gond as original Brahmin, which means sacred.

The status of Jagat Gond is barber in their Gond hierarchy. Oti Gond is compared to a white tiger, which is the symbol of a hero.

The eight clans (*saga*) of the Gonds in Kalahandi adjoining Chhatishgarh have their territory described in the *Purja*, which is the story of migration and settlement of the Gonds from the West to the East.[25]

Some motifs in the *Purja* may be very small, even as small as a word but it will bear the meaning of an entire myth or epic. Killing the white tiger or comparing to a white tiger is a symbol to signify a hero. Similarly, the black serpent and a Brahmin are two key words which are found in the origin myths of the Naga and also in epics and tales.

Markam is associated with the milk sea which is the abode of their supreme god Chaturbhuj Budha Deo. This signifies the supremacy of Markam over the others.

It is observed that a line in the caste genealogy is expanded into a full-length epic. For instance, if the origin of Markam clan is narrated it will be a long story of their origin, kinship, clan symbols, and totem through which they saved their lives, etc.

Similarly, the Kondh Gova myth also has many esoteric signs and phrases which are necessary to understand it from the socio-cultural context. The verbal and visual symbols in the epics are very much local and esoteric, and much more attached to their ethnic worldviews. When the Kondh hero emerges from the forest, the singer narrates him as a hero jumping a height of twelve-hands high. The hero is using one of his ears as a bed and the other ear as a blanket wrapped around his body. The meaning of it is very tradition-bound and attached to the remote past, that it is very difficult to find the meaning. Sometimes the real animals or birds which are described in mythical terms needs to be explained by the singers or else, the whole meaning of the text will be distorted. For example, the singer associates the crow with Garuda – the mythical vehicle bird of Lord Vishnu. Similarly a cock is known as sixteen-horned sheep. Even the water gourd and water pumpkin are symbols of an elder son of the Kondh priest who is to be sacrificed to appease the earth mother goddess.

Symbols play a major role in perpetuating the meaning of the characters and epic events. When I went to see Kachhra Dhurua, a Gond culture hero worshipped in the village Deobhog, the priest took me to a place where only a stone was installed at the base of a tree. When I asked the Gond priest, he showed me the stone and said that the stone image was Kachhra Dhurua and that he was worshipped in the stone.

The language used in narration by the epic singers is different from one another in view of their ethnic differences. The Gond tribe and the Gaur caste use local Oriya language while narrating the epics, myths, and tales. The Bhunjias and the Paharia tribe speak their ethnic language. The Kondhs have their Kondhan language belonging to Dravidian language group. Banjara also have their Rajasthani dialect. Although the Debgunias speak in local language, which is akin to the language of the Gonds and the Gaurs, the epics and myths they sing is in standard Oriya.

But there is a difference between the spoken language and the narrative language. In the narrative language, the singers use the language and phrases of poetic expression. The content is a story drawn from the mythical, historical, and the cultural world that helped them in constructing the worldview of their community and shaping their personality.

One important aspect of oral epics and mythical poetry is the use of two-line songs, which have been adopted by the community as popular proverbs. Mythical narratives and epics are full of proverbs. People use this proverb for conflict resolution and refer to it to validate the social function. Even the ethnic conflicts have found place in the proverbs. Some customs, rules, practices, and ethnic characteristics and symbols are narrated in the proverbs. Distribution of clan and gods, ethnic dress and hairstyle etc. are narrated in the proverbs and that signify the distinct character of an ethnic group.

It is observed that some people from other communities also know the epic songs. There are villages with two communities (the Kamar tribe and Gaur caste) and their mother tongue is different from that of the others. In such a case, it is found that the Gaurs know the ethnic language of the Kamars and also their folklore. Similarly, the folklore of tribal people is known to the Doms (a scheduled caste with close economic and cultural affinity with the tribal people). It is found that the smaller community, due to their linguistic affinity, popularly knows the folklore of the majority because they share a common language; whereas the folklore a smaller community remains esoteric to others. So the smaller the ethnic group, the greater are the esoteric elements. In one case, a barber in a Parja village was fluent in Parji language and was equally good at singing the Parja narratives to accompany the main parja singer.

The language of the epic songs is drawn from the tradition-bound symbols, metaphors, and generative language shaped in course of time. It is found that meaning of some traditional words is obscure and the younger generation does not know this. The visual images are imagined from the local environment and are fit into the epic situation to intensify the narration. As all these are poetry, the style and the rhyme, the recitation and the presentation is shaped in the mind of the singer who shapes both the mental text and expresses it in verbal text consistently.

Use of dialogue, lullabies, lament songs, commands, eulogy, speeches of different characters, and narration of the singers to lead the story from one sequence to another;

pausing through musical sounds or through repetition of the same lines by the accompanying singers is found during the performance.

ii. Length of the Epic

Regarding the length of the epics, many scholars have different opinions. Folk singers say that they sing the *Katha* or *geet* for twelve days and twelve nights, or seven days and seven nights depending on the speciality of the performance. In Bhunjia community, the female singers (Gurumai) sing the *mahul jatra* song for a whole month. The huge oral performance means a great deal of prestige to the singer. In the *Bhima Sidi*, the Boguas and the Gurumai (spirit women) sing the song for seven days and seven nights together. In feet the ritual also takes place for seven days and nights. The ritual part is followed by the singing of *Bhima Sidi geet*. This is like the *Sri Krishna Leela*, in which the episodes are divided into parts and performed accordingly. The virtue and expertise of the singer are known from his ability to perform the episodes as long as he can.

The *Chital Singh Chhatri*, *Bhima Sidi*, *Gova Utra*, *Sunadi Janam*, *Lakshmi Janam* and *Allah Udal* are long epics, which are recited and accompanied by music. The epic *Barakhena Bans geet*, 12 cycles of Gaur epic songs, is a long epic. Unfortunately, only three or four epics are available with us. The most popular epic among the Gaurs is the *Kharatmal Chhatri*. In folk imagination, there are sixteen *malla*s and seven ploughmen, and twelve cycles of epics, but now it is very difficult to get all those songs and reconstruct the whole epic cycles.

The length of the epic song depends on the mood, situation, and context. Performance of an epic song is flexible. A particular song performed during the making of the chips by breaking the stone is different from singing the same song while making ropes throughout the night, or harvesting the paddy on the threshing floor. The threshing floor is a more suitable context than the wage labour situation because the Gaur singer is more comfortable in the paddy field than in any other occupation. The reason for giving more attention to the singing of the tale in the night at the threshing floor is to keep the *halia* (agriculture labourers) awake, so that thieves do not enter their open field and steal their paddy. Breaking stones and making chips is not an ethnic occupation of the Gaurs. But, during the off-season, to earn their livelihood, the Gaur epic singer prefers the other occupation. Singing the epic song while working has, thus, different purposes with same meaning.

When Bhajan Nial, the singer of Gaur epic *Kotrabaina Ramela*, performed the epic during their Ganesh Puja, it was a simulated situation. He comfortably sang the song as though it was not an actual performance context. But Bhajan Nial sang the song and very precisely and completed the epic in 375 lines.

One singer, Siba Nang, while singing the *Kharatmal* took four hours to complete the epic. The situation was encouraging. In the night, after taking food, the community was listening and Siba Nang, with endless enthusiasm, narrated the song accompanied with the *Bans* (a three-feet long bamboo wind instrument) played by Chamru, one of his accompanying singers.

There are also the epic songs sung by Boguas and Parghanias which are very small in length. The *Ramji Huna Sati and Hiro Diwani,* are long in the form of a single episode, whereas *Raja Isalu* is a long epic narrative with multiple episodes.

Nangmati Rajaphulia is a small epic. But it takes a long time when the Parghania with his *dhundhunia* recites it. The nature of the song with regards to characteristics, and not length, determines whether it is to be termed as an epic.

iii Oral Formula

The epic singer constructs the text in his memory, forms the episodes in the logical sequence, and expresses the texts in a given linguistic formula which is inherited in oral singing tradition. There is a thin difference between the spoken language and the epic language. As the episode is presented in the sung form, the syntax and the use of language in the poetry become generative. The creative metaphor, simile, and the symbols represent the folk poetics. Association of words and objects is extended to the association of events between the characters in the drama and the objects seen around in the visual world. According to Mulokozi, 'tradition operates at the deep structural level, the level of story and formula generation, while conscious artistry operates at the personal – the level of verbalization, histrionics, interaction with the audience'[26].

The oral formula applied in the *Bhima Sidi* or in the *Gova Utra* song reveals the perpetuation of epic formula. In the *Gova Utra* song, many proverbs used in the Kondh community are found in the text and these proverbs are created from the texts. The beliefs and practices, value and ritual rules are narrated in the proverbs. These proverbs are the outcome of universally accepted conventions. The proverbs are, in fact, the lines of the myth/epic which have been accepted by the community as a part of social rules. Let us consider the following two lines from the *Gova Utra* myth.

Pat bandha ho Badaka je
Kude Dhara ho Tuduka je
Jhi dia ho Sermelka. Je
Sermelka bua Sermelka je.

Here, three Kondhs have been identified with three clans. They are Badaka, Tuduka and Sermelka. These three clans have a close affinity with the Naga prince of Kalahandi. It is the convention that before coronation the Naga King of Kalahandi should have the favour of the Kondh tribe. The Badaka would tie the turban on the head of the prince. Then the prince would sit on the lap of the Kondh leader of Tuduka clan. This was the symbol of the Kondhs' support to the Naga ruler. Last of all, the Kondh leader of Sermelka clan would offer his daughter to the prince and only then the Naga prince would be able to marry a princess of royal lineage.

This convention is sung in the *Gova Utra* song. The relation of the Kondh with the King of Kalahandi is reflected in the myth. But it has become a popular proverb.

If the whole *Gova Utra* song is analysed it will reveal that the whole epic is a bundle of tradition-bound proverbs with the history of social stratification, events and

meaning, all arranged chronologically to form a story. Similarly, many lines of oral epics and myths are used as proverbs. It is possible when all the people share the epics and understand the purpose and meaning of it. The oral formula in the epic was to know the social events and rules and customs and to follow them. If some social rules are violated, the evidence of the epics and myth are quoted to resolve the dispute.

Similarly the creation myths, which are recited during the rituals, also have the same formula. The sequencing of events is recited and the stock language, phrases, and the proverbs are used to keep the story line intact.

iv. Oral Transmission

The mental text of the singer determines the expression of verbal texts. The memory of the singer both in texts and the generative language, inherited from his culture, helps the singer frame the content in the verbal framework. The singer formulates the scheme and most of the text and its language are borrowed from the cultural world. As an individual, the singer is enriched with this cultural world and frames the scheme of reproducing the mental text as the verbal text. The scheme is framed; the singer, while performing the epic song, moulds the performance texts suitably without distorting the main scheme.

The expression is direct and precise while presenting a text, but within the text if some elaboration is required, it takes lots of time. In Bhima epic, the description of the 12 types of jungles, or description of the characters of the 12 brothers of Bhima, each representing a heroic feature, is so elaborate that sometimes the main text is sidelined. The singer, of course, comes back to the main topic when the audience remind him.

Sequencing the texts in mythical text is another area to understand the transmission. In Kondh *Gova Utra* song, the sequence of the events is sometimes skipped and this is not accepted by the audience. In that case, the singer has to change the topic and rearrange the song with logical sequence. Interestingly, the senior people of the community know the storyline of the epic or myth and they regulate it. In case of new singers this happens occasionally.

Errors in spelling and listening are another area of concern. Sometimes the names are spelled in a different way. Different communities in different epics use even one name. *Chital Singh Chhatri* is a popular Gond epic, but the Gaurs also sing *Chital Singh* story which is different from the Gond one.

Another epic story is *Mardaba King*. It is about the brother–sister incest and the sister commits suicide. The same brother–sister incest story is found among the Kondhs. But in this volume, *Nangmati Rajaphulia* is not a story of brother–sister incest. In another version (available among the Kondh singers and also the *birthia* singer community), Nangmati a foster daughter of the village headman, is seduced in the boat and thus she commits suicide for the reason that she was considering him as her own brother. Thus, the story and the function being constant, the name of the character is a variable.

Mythical narratives, which involve ritual performance, have their own space and time followed by complex socio-religious rules. But heroic, romantic, and social episodes

that found place in the epics are performed and sung for different purposes. The singer-community explained that they sing the long epic song at night while watching over the paddy crop in the threshing floor in the field. They used to sing it loudly so that thieves hiding anywhere near the heap of paddy crop, nearer to the singer, will not be able to steal. Another purpose is to prepare ropes throughout the night and therefore one singer will sing and others will work and enjoy the story.

The epic song is also narrated among the singers who go to far off places to make stone chips, bricks, and to construct houses. While they break the chips, or make bricks they sing the epic song so that they can spend the time and time will pass with work and song. But this purpose is different from the main purpose of the epic. This recitation actually is, as told by the singers, to teach the young on the technique of singing and learning of the text.

Epics and Identity

Kalahandi represents a multi-ethnic, heterogeneous culture.

Ethnicity in Indian context should be viewed from the *jati* system. Each and every *jati* has its own occupation, language, and a distinct set of common practices with their cultural objective. Mallick is of opinion that, ' "jati" is mainly operative at the local and regional level and these *jati-varna* scheme of social stratification have been expounded, commented and interpreted in myths and folklore'.[27]

Folk-Hero as Historical Character

The ex-princely state of Khariar was ruled over by the Chauhan dynasty. The history of Chauhans in Khariar focuses on their culture hero Ramai Deo. In fourteenth century A.D. Ramai Deo established his Chauhan rule subduing the oligarchic form of government in Patnagarh. The present Chauhan of Khariar estate is the direct descendant of Ramai Deo, the culture hero of western Orissa. (Singh Deo, 1987:276)[28]

Koshalananda Kavya was written by the court poet Sri Gangadhar Mishra of Sambalpur in the sixteenth century. It is a Sanskrit literary epic on Ramai Deo and his descendants. This historical-literary epic focuses on the Chauhan rule in western Orissa which Khariar was a part of (*Ibid* 274).

Similarly *Jay Candrika* is a Hindi epic written by poet Prahlad Dubey in seventeenth century who was a court poet of Saranagarh. Besides, Sri Dibyakishore Sahu of Bolangir has written an epic named *Ramai Deo*. These three epics bear the description of Chauhan rule in western Orison. In all these epics, Ramai Deo is described as the culture hero. (*Ibid* 274)

With regards to the Chauhan settlement in Manikgarh, the narrative of Cobden Ramsey is worth mentioning. The narrative of Ramai Deo is meaningful in terms of its commonality with lots of oral epics, tales and legends of Khariar region.

The ethnographic accounts of the royal and tribal traditions which have been collected and documented by the nineteenth century British ethnographers, reflect

the origin myths of the Chauhan and other tribal people of Kalahandi adjoining Chhatishgarh and western Orissa and reveal the sharing of common stock of mythology. The key motifs of Ramai Deo epic are found in many tribal heroic myths and epics of Kalahandi and Chhatishgarh. The Bhunjias, Kamars, and the Dhurua tribes have similar narration of their caste origin.

The common motifs found among the Chauhan origin myths and the tribal myths are

- The king/tribal chieftain is killed.
- His pregnant queen is abandoned.
- She is found wandering in the jungle.
- She is given shelter by a saint/father figure/tribal chief.
- She gives birth to a child/twins.
- The child bears the signs of a miraculous hero.
- He comes out to be a hero.
- He wins the enemies/kills them.
- Hero regains his lost regime/lost property/lost parents.

Similarly, the origins myth of the tribal tradition is close to the *Ramai Deo* epic. The difference between *Ramai Deo* epic and the tribal epic heroes is that Ramai Deo is a historical character in a given time and space whereas the epic heroes of tribal communities are not associated with time, but associated with space. They can be found both in the past and the present. Ramai Deo is dated back to the fourteenth century and he had a great name in the history of western Orissa, known as South Koshala in the pages of medieval history.

Naga in Kalahandi

The emergence of the establishment of Naga rule in Kalahandi bears the mythical epic of the Nagas of Chhotanagpur. The Naga origin myth is also very popular in Bhumij and Munda communities. The Bhumij and the Naga king of Chhotanagpur also have similar caste origin myths.

The origin myth of the Naga kings in Kalahandi is found in both prose and verse form written by Pata Raja Padman Singh of Thuamul Rampur. The manuscript is *Nagavansa Charita.* In this texts the origin of Naga from *Pundarika Naga* is described vividly and had tried to establish that the Nagas of Kalahandi area from the Naga dynasties of Chhotanagpur.[29]

The common motifs in Naga myths are

- Hero fled from the enemies in disguise.
- Hero takes shelter in a Brahmin guru's house for learning.
- Hero marries the guru's daughter secretly.

- Heroine discovers the hero as a different man.
- She compels the hero to reveal the truth.
- Hero denies and passes the time.
- Heroine gets labour pain in the forest.
- She wants the hero to reveal the truth.
- Hero reveals the truth that he is a Naga and disappears.
- Heroine gives birth to a boy and burns herself in the funeral pyre.
- The child cries and the hero comes back and rears the child.
- A Brahmin sees the child under the hood of a serpent.
- Hero requests the Brahmin to rear the child.
- Hero predicts the future of the child as the king of Nagpur.
- The Brahmin offers the child to a tribal (Munda) chief.
- Tribal chief again offers the child to his prime minister.
- The prime minister and the Brahmin reared the child.
- The child became a hero.
- A competition occurs between the tribal chief's son and the hero for the selection of the king.
- The hero's son becomes the king.
- He marries a Kshatriya girl and rules the kingdom.

The motifs of the Naga mythology from Chhotanagpur are similar to the Naga account of Kalahandi because the Naga kings of Kalahandi trace their ancestry to Chhotanagpur. Now if we compare these motifs with the oral epics of Kalahandi, it would be evident that the Gaur and Gond epics are similar to the motifs of the Naga origin myth. The hero in disguise is the key motif in Naga myth, which is reflected in the epic of Bhima. It is evident from the Naga and Kondh affinity that the myths and epics also mutually influence each other. Of course, it is very difficult to ascertain whether the royal myth is ancient or the tribal myth, and which influenced the other.

But it is inferred that there are three layers of such myth and epic.

1. The first one is found in the classical myths of India. This is all about a hero character of divine/royal origin. This is the mythical epic found in Sanskrit and regional languages of India.
2. The same mythical story is found as the historical character with some modification associated with some place and time. Thus the mythical hero becomes a legendary hero. Here the mythical hero transforms into a historic /legendary hero.
3. The same mythical epic is reinterpreted among the tribal people and found abundantly in oral tradition. Most of the heroic epics narrated by the epic

singers and caste genealogists are ethnic in nature, also variables, keeping the functions and motifs constant.

One reason for such adoption of myths among the royal dynasties is to identify themselves with the ancient solar or lunar dynasties of the country, thereby glorifying the status, and also to ramify the caste genealogies to establish that they are the ancient race so that they can validate their authority over the kingdom.

Identity of the Singers with Relation to their Patrons

Each and every caste bard identifies his lineage either to a sage or king of greater Indian tradition. The Parghanias identify their superiority over the Gonds, and the Boguas and Marals over the Kondhs. The Debgunia, tracing his ancestry from Debguru Vrihaspati establishes his ownership of the puranic knowledge over the tribals and the non-tribals. His association with the agricultural society, disseminating the puranic knowledge among the women folk is honorary and socially accepted. Similarly, the Parghania for the Gonds and the Bogua for the Kondhs establish their superiority (elder brother) over their patrons. They extend the traditional oral knowledge to their patron's house and perpetuate the oral family history and caste genealogies. But along with the singing, their family, the singer's wife and children also take part in many creative tasks such as tattooing, bead-making, playing music, singing small songs, telling tales and riddling, decorating hair of the women folk in their patron's house and many more activities.

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[15] Lambodhar Hans, the son-in-law of epic singer Bhajan Nial of kapsi village, sings the story of Chital Singh in which a police inspector appears.

[16] Mulokozi, M.M., (2002) The African Epic Controversy, *Fabula*, Vol.43: p-7.

[17] *Ibid:* p-8

[18] Jason, Heda,(1998) Indian and Euro-Afro-Asian Epic Tradition, in Honko, Handoo and Foley (Ed) in *Epics Oral and Written*, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore: p–121.

[19] *Ibid:* p–119.

[20] It is a word for rituals that keep the world green.

[21] This is a magical wand and is worshipped by the Gauds.

[22] Oinas, Felix, J, (1972) *Folk Epic in Folklore and Folklife, An Introduction*. (Ed) Dorson, University of Chicago Press: Pp.106-107.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Singh, K.S., (1987) *The Chhotanagpur Raj: Mythology, Structure and Ramification in Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North-eastern India*, Sinha Surajit (Ed), Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta: p-562.

[25] I met Sri Parasuram Majhi, a village headman in 1986 in his village Malpada. After listening to me, he allowed me to use his Purja- caste genealogy. He is no more in this world. The meaning of the purja is still obscure in terms of getting its meaning. However, the eight saga Gonds found in Kalahandi and Chhatishgarh are very happy to get this Purja revived from me. Here I mention the eight saga and their territories in middle India.

[26] Mulokozi, The African Epic Controversy. With Reference to the 'Enanga' Epic Tradition of the Bahaya. *Fabula* 43. Band (2002) www.atypon-link.com/WDG/doi/pdf/10.1515/fabl.2002.023.

[27] Mallick, Op at 1975: p–35.

[28] Singh Deo, Jitamitra Prashad, (1986) *Cultural Profile of South Koshala*, New Delhi: Gyan Publication.

[29] Singh, K.S., (1987) *The Chhotanagpur Raj:* Mythology in Tribal Polities and State Systems in Precolonial Eastern and Northeastern India, Sinha Surajit (Ed), Centre for Studies in Social Science, Calcutta: Pp.52-54.

Chapter 14

CONCLUSION

From the discussion so far in the previous chapters, we may postulate some conclusion. But the conclusion is not binding, rather, it is the beginning of a discourse relating to a land and a culture where the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Kalahandi does exist. The mythical epics, historical and heroic epics represent the time of two important ages of human culture.[1] One is pre-agricultural state where people were adapted to nature and supernaturalism and developed their worldview. It was also the coexistence of nature, animals and human beings forming an integrated worldview interdependent on each other.

Then came the civilization of pastorals followed by agriculture, which are the greatest contributions to mankind. It is mentioned elsewhere that in South-East Asia, the lands of Kalahandi and Koraput were the ancient places where people started cultivation of paddy. It is important to note that even today after thousands of years, people in Kalahandi narrate the story of the origin of paddy in the form of oral tradition. This signifies the continuity of human culture by recollecting the past through the ages.

While initiating agriculture, people did not abandon nature; instead they formed a culture of plurality – interdependence of forest and agriculture. As we know, Kalahandi is a rain-shadow region, saturating the earth with rainwater only, people depend on rain water only and were therefore they had the traditional water harvesting process. When there was a scarcity of rainwater, they were praying the rain god for rain. So worship of rain god was in their religious practice. The hymn of the priest was filling the sky and air with the earnest eulogy for rain.

The earnest prayer for water to give good harvest and save mankind, by providing food to save the future generations were the major concern of the people of Kalahandi. This has been narrated in the creation myth of the Gonds and Kondhs in which after creating mankind, God created paddy. Along with the invention of agricultural implements, use of iron, levelling the field and getting harvest was altogether a supernatural act; an unbelievable puzzle for the pre-logical human to understand the mystery of nature. Therefore, even though man adopted agriculture, he did not forget his past, the love for nature and the gods and goddesses he worshipped in the forest. The etiological myths and the totems of the animals associated with the clan myths are so close that it embraced all the creatures around its memory. So the earthworm, crab,

tortoise, crow, wild dog, tiger, jackal, and many other birds and animals are part and parcel of the human ecology. These creatures have not disappeared even today from the cultural realm of the people. But what is disappearing is their past knowledge, which helped them survive during natural calamities.

From being nomads to a settled lifestyle, and from food gatherers and hunters to settled agriculturists – perhaps it has taken thousands of years to shape the culture. Therefore, when we come across the primitive tribe such as the Kamars and Bhunjia in Kalahandi, we also come across the same tribal groups such as the Gonds and the Kondhs as settled agriculturists. The Gaurs were also the migrants with the Kondhs as shown in the Kondh myths and epics. They formed villages. Initially, it was a land of clan-based territory. Therefore, the story of conflict was visible among the tribes for ownership of land. Then they resolved the conflict and started a harmonious life in which not only the tribes, but also the occupation groups such as the Gaurs (milkmen), potters, carpenters, blacksmiths, barbers, weavers, boatmen, and liquor vendors and many other caste groups lived together forming a self-sufficient economic group. Then they created their interdependence in economic life and therefore shared the common belief of gods and goddesses. This is a long way to understand the struggle and settlement of human beings in this land.

Discussing the indigenous and boundary-marking statements of verbal arts, Abrahams says,

> 'The way in which ethnic lore explores the subject of social and cultural differences has been especially useful as an index to the intensity of social stratification and the dynamic of inter group relation.'[2]

Furthermore, he discussed about the lore of self and others. While self is esoteric, others is exoteric and through this, to understand the 'techniques of boundary marking and dynamic arising between the bounded groups'. Conflict between the Gond and the Kondhs for land, and the conflict between the Kamars and the Dhuruas for intervention in the forest territories are the signifiers of self and other.

After the royal ownership in the administration of Kalahandi, the tribal people lost their autonomy and gradually became a part of the administrative system. Invention of advanced agricultural technology during 1882 A.D. was also harmful for the local tribals. The land revenue system compelled the village headman to pay revenue to the king and that led to the transfer of land and village administration to the non-tribal. This led to the Kondh rebellion. Another historical disaster was that in the 1700 villages of Kalahandi during 1856, the total population of the Kondhs was 76 percent. How did it become 30 percent during the independence struggle? How did they reduce to this number and where did they go?[3]

Then came the royal powers and Bramhinical knowledge and the royal/British administrative system that changed the structural framework of the native people of Kalahandi. Replacement of tradition, and adoption and validation of new political order supported by the sacred centres was the cultural model which was symbolized by

the state deities such as Samaleswari and Manikeswari. Because these deities are of royal origin, they are absent in the oral epics and myths.

Ethnicity is understood from the viewpoint of a group with common interest. According to Abrahams,[4]

> 'Indigenous people is a blanket term for aboriginal inhabitants of a territory who are relatively powerless politically and only partially integrated into the dominant nation state. Indigenous people are associated with non industrial modes of production and a stateless political system.' (Minority Rights group 1990)

From the above viewpoint, it can be discussed how historically the Kondhs have been marginalized in their land which was known as Kondhan Desh (land of the Kondhs). However, the story does not end here.

Except agriculture and labour, no other source is available for the common people to earn their livelihood. So, they migrate to the neighbouring states. Therefore drought, deforestation, and migration are three major issues in addition to poverty and illiteracy. When education and modernity entered Kalahandi, traditional knowledge was confined to the non-literates only. So, there was a clear division between the literates and non-literates. Literate people discarded the traditional knowledge. Tribal people maintained their knowledge upto the realm of social use and acceptance among their own interest groups. Thus, even in a non-industrialized society, traditional knowledge was under a serious threat of extinction.

Drought in Kalahandi

History of repeated drought, fast vanishing jungles, and unemployment in rural areas of Kalahandi led to rampant migration of the common people. Many families left their homes and opted for seasonal migration. Some have permanently migrated and settled down in the cities they work. From 1966 till now, there has been a great change in the socio-economic life of the people of Kalahandi. The oral tradition and the rituals bear the sign of drought.

Drought is evident in the social memory of Kalahandi. They attempt to compensate the loss in nature through culture. We may take an example of a folktale to investigate the folk psychology reflected in the oral traditions of this locality. Being affected by the drought, the folk mind has tried to compensate their natural loss in their cultural and ideological domain. According to their folk belief, this is a country where 'miracles are expected as solutions for social problems', through some socio-political processes or some supernatural forces.

It is natural that the folk mind of Kalahandi has no concrete solutions for a greater social problem such as drought. But the impossibility of solutions to such problems in reality is done up in imagination. Traditionally, the culture of the people is shaped according to its natural adaptability. This may be examined through a folk tale of Kalahandi. The tale is as follows.

> Once, Indra, the rain deity of heaven, being annoyed with the people for not worshipping him, vowed not to pour rain on the earth for 12 years, which resulted in a terrible famine in the said region. Cattle started dying owing to shortage of water and grass. Even people started dying of starvation.
>
> Meanwhile, an old cultivator of a village called in all his sons to his presence and said that they have spent their time in playing and merrymaking. He continued that he had become old like the ripened leaves of a dry tree. Now or then he might pass away. So he wanted his sons to learn the technique of cultivation. Ordered by their father, the sons took bullocks and ploughed the field. But the soil was too hard for the share to penetrate. So the old man took all his sons to a river bed and started ploughing. The whole atmosphere was filled with an illusion of cultivating the field in the rainy season.
>
> Indra, out of curiosity, came down to the river bank in the guise of a Brahmin. He saw the old man with his sons ploughing the river bed. He asked the old man as to why he was ploughing the river bed like a madman. The old man told Indra that he knew it was futile to plough there. But one should not forget his occupation. Everyone should make his descendants learn his parental occupation.
>
> Hearing it, Indra returned leaving the old cultivator and thought that the old man had opened his eyes. One should train his sons in the parental occupation, otherwise after him they would be nowhere. So Indra ordered his four sons (four clouds according to folk belief) to learn how to pour rain on the earth. Needless to say the barren earth overflowed with rainwater. Indra now realized how the old cultivator extracted rain from him by deception.[5]

In reality, it is not possible for a human being to out-think his god or any supernatural power. So the old cultivator cleverly compelled Indra to allot rain. The trick played by the old cultivator is nothing but to overcome the real situation of drought through imagination. The sole motif of this tale is based on a theory that when a desire is not fulfilled in reality, it is fulfilled in imagination in the form of folklore or dream. The imagination of such a story in the mental structure of a storyteller or epic singer might have been evolved to maintain the equilibrium between nature and culture.

But this story reveals another function of the society that the knowledge is perpetuated from generation to generation.

Praying to the Raingod

There is a folk ritual presently followed in Kalahandi to face drought. The rain God Bhima is worshipped through shamanistic processes in tribal areas. If the crop situation is acute owing to lack of rain, people perform the marriage ceremony of God Bhima with Goddess Kondhen. They believe that by doing this they will get rain. Here, it is seen that to solve the natural problem of drought the folk mind of this locality has imitated the Risyasringa-Jarata episode of *Ramayana* parochializing it in the form of Bhima and Kondhen.

The social function of the epics in Kalahandi is important in terms of celebrating the ritual performance. The Bhima-Kondhen marriage is for rain. It is like the Risyasringa-Jarata episode of *Ramayana*. *Allah Udal* epic is sung for rain.

Functions of Epics

Indian scriptures advocate for search for truth, and ultimate aim of all human being is to live a righteous life and even after death retain the virtue (punya) to perpetuate the lineage. Therefore, the oral tradition and rituals, both play an important role in quenching the religious thirst of the people. Ethics and duty (*dharma*) play an important role in culture and life. This is manifested in the social and religious institutions. Informal learning and maintaining of social order was possible through listening to the sacred texts and conducting the rituals. Culture at home, at the village/society, at the region and in the country is well knitted in the society of Kalahandi in which everyone shares the common stock of knowledge. It is the difference in space that involves the reinterpretation of culture according to their social needs. Therefore, when we see that the kings or the Brahmins with their occupational groups were organizing oral performance and religious rites of listening to the *Harivamsa*, *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*, the counter point among the tribal and the untouchables had their autonomous system of listening to their sacred texts through oral performance conducted by different social groups. By this way, they maintain their cultural identity and fulfil the aim of life.

The purpose of institutionalization of epic singers in the society is that it is a part of caste dignity. Maintaining caste genealogies is only to maintain their duty. It had a direct bearing on their land ownership and controlling village administration. Sometimes it was the signifier of determining the territories of the respective ethnic groups. The patron caste learns their caste genealogies and ethnic *dharma* from their ancestors and the singers are the record keepers of their ancestors. The singers maintained the *dharma* of keeping the caste glory high. The *dharma* then leads to *artha* - earning, and then to *kama* - pleasure/ procreation. In the epic, the struggle to get a woman was to perpetuate one's own lineage; through a woman by getting a son and survive through him. The last one was *moksha* - salvation. These four kinds of stages (*varga*) come in the life of a human being. The epics and myths of Indian culture, or say sub culture, represent the aforesaid stages. Listening to the epic means attaining the four stages, because the divine hero comes across these four stages and completes the life cycle successfully. The heroic actions inspire the listeners, especially of one's own clan, to follow the footsteps of their ancestors. The singer is honoured and his musical instruments are also worshipped. Nobody dares to dishonour the singer and disobey him. Here lies the secrets of religious influence to the heroes, and so to say, the heroes are more divine than human in Indian epics.

Epics in Transition

Sanskritic culture has been assimilated into the local culture. The politics of religion and the shift of status from tribal goddesses to fort goddesses is the symbol of sanskritization.

After state formation, introduction of the state deities in Kalahandi unified the power of the Naga Kings. Goddess Samaleswari in Khariar state and Goddess Manikeswari in Kalahandi state became the symbols of power concentration. The sacred centres in tribal region, the temples and introduction of sacred institutions in rural areas by the non-tribal village headman, and the landowners validated the singing of purana (mythic texts) in palm-leaf manuscripts by the Brahmin as the priest and teachers influenced the local culture.

Dissemination of sacred Oriya texts in regional language to quench the thirst to learn and acquire wisdom, both in *durbars* and the villages, changed the cultural environment. The singers, the priests, the astrologers, and the Debgunias gradually penetrated into the tribal region and created interest in the myths among them.

But the association of Goddess Durga with Earth Goddess, paddy with Lakshmi, Budha Deo with Siva, air god and rain god with Bhima is a later interpolation. The cultural diffusion and assimilation among the native tribal with the non-tribal gave birth to a composite culture which ultimately influenced the tribal epics and myths.

Epic: An Endangered Genre

The professional singers, who were once the glory of the land to sing the divine and heroic saga and epics, now remain as the remnants of a golden era. When the caste bards of different occupation groups have an obsession of the past of glorious deeds of their caste heroes, their present world miserably fails to provide them a suitable field to revitalize their profession. Therefore, the epic genre in Kalahandi has become a forgotten genre in the memories of the coming generations. Only a section of elderly persons can memorize their golden past through the oral tradition, which they had listened or learned during their childhood. The love for the lost glory and the quest for truth of life of their ancestors is found ingrained in the collective memory of the people for a long period of time. Therefore, the epics such as *Bhima Sidi*, *Chital Singh Chhatri*, origin of gods and goddesses, local legends and the legendary epics of the Naga and Chauhan are widespread throughout the region. Not only this, events such as the Kondh revolt against the outsider cultivators (supported by the king) are also vivid in the memory of people. In Kalahandi, drought picture is another area of memory, which bears hundreds of disastrous family histories. But because this is a truth and reality, they do not want to share it. It means they do not want to remember the miseries they have witnessesed. It reveals that when the past is shared, the present is not. Therefore, when the myths and epics are widely shared in public and private domain, personal stories are not. A clear demarcation of individual experience and the cultural expression is found in the life of the people of Kalahandi. Knowledge of the past is respected, even practiced, to safeguard their present. But it is not easy to find a story of the present in orality. Perhaps this is due to the influence of modernity. The pace of such creation is very slow in assimilating the content of current characters and events in the epic tradition. Thus, construction of cultural expression through traditional mode and its gradual transition across time and space is visible in the oral expression of the people.

From Singer to Beggar

They know the songs, they sing the glory of their ancestors and clan masters. They understand the characters and events and the people who lived in the land. They know the meaning of the trees and forest, and the story of the mountains and land. But this traditional knowledge has little to do with the present generation.

Their clan masters do not have much interest now to listen to the fictious past. When the writing system was not available, they were crazy to write their *Purja*, but when writing system is available, they do not write or maintain it. This is genocide of culture. The glorious singer-communities became beggars owing to lack of patronization from their clan masters. They have no scope for livelihood. Some of them have adopted agriculture and become agricultural labourers. But their race memory does not allow them to serve as labourers. The Gond and Kondh singers are the worst sufferers because they cannot beg.

While the Debgunia-eulogists of the Goddess Lakshmi can earn their livelihood by begging from door to door in villages, the Parghania – Gond singer cannot beg. They are now passive tradition-bearers. It would not be improper to infer that the rich cultural heritage of the tribal people is mingled with the gradual passing away of the old and aged singers of the communities.

Heterogeneity

In course of the coexistence of different castes and tribes, they become caste friendly. A particular caste being either an enemy of a caste group or a friend of a caste group depends upon their relation. The enemy-caste is shown as villain and they are picturized as the enemies in their narratives. It may be due to the power struggle or oppressions of one caste over the other. The dispute for land is also the root cause of caste enmity. On the other hand, the caste having close affinity with another caste is portrayed as a friend-caste. The Doms with the Kondhs, the Bhatras with the Gonds, the Gaur with the Gonds have close affinity in terms of friendly caste. Coexistence of two or more castes in a village (one is a tribal and other is a non-tribal) also influences the construction of epics in the mental text of a singer. Take the example of the Bhunjias and the potters. It is mentioned in the Bhunjia epic that the pregnant Bhunjia queen took shelter in a *kumbhar's* house and gave birth to a child who became a hero and killed his father's enemy and regained his lost kingdom (the kingdom may be a small village!). Coexistence of two castes has thus created an epic of harmony and mutual cooperation. This was possible when the potters and the Bhunjia lived together, and both the communities shared the occupation of the potters by sharing labour, preparing bricks and tiles and earning their livelihood.

People's perception of their own epic or myth is attached to their race memory and deep emotion. A person from Gaur community was asked to sing a song. He took keen interest in documenting the song and started singing. He is a Gaur leader and a semi-literate man. But after singing for five to seven minutes, he burst into tears and could

not control his emotions and stopped singing. He was weeping. The reason was that he could not bear to narrate the struggle of his caste hero, who had taken pains to establish his own caste. Therefore, he could not even complete the story. I tried to persuade him to continue, but he refused.

People's perception of the mythical epics and oral epics has relevance to their castes. The mythic epics and the legendary epics attached to their clan deities are believed to be true. During rituals, and festival, therefore, the past becomes meaningful, present is absent and the priests/singers take the people to an imaginary world, the world of another reality.

Social function of the epics forms the foundation of its existence. The singers are sacred. The starting and ending of the epics and myths (all are sung verse) must have a eulogy of the Goddess of words - Saraswati. The village goddesses are also worshipped. The sixteen sisters of Ganga (river), twelve brothers of Baburai (gods), *char chourasi muni* (four eighty-four sages) *dongar pahar* (hills and mountains), the clan gods and goddesses all are invoked before the singing is initiated. Similarly, between the performances, the singer also worships the goddess to complete the work successfully.

Revitalizing Oral Epics

Community Support: It is necessary to seek the permission from the *Jati Mahasabha* to revitalize the epics and myths and caste genealogies of their respective communities for writing clan history and social history. Once the *Jati Mahasabha* agrees to this, the singers of their respective clans will be ready to change their mind and sing the esoteric songs. This, in no way breaks any social or religious rules. Instead, the community has its cultural revival. It is not sufficient to document the texts in written form. We know the basic difference between the written documented text of a performance text. To bridge the gap and also to have a natural performance text it is necessary to have audio and video documentation system. There is a gap between the scholars and the community. Once the scholars collect the data, his relationship with the community or the informant is over. This practice rather creates a disbelief among the community and they gradually discard the scholars. Sharing the knowledge is most important and ethics should be maintained.

It is not sufficient to provide support or reconnect the singers with their clan masters. It is necessary to recognize the singer's talent and knowledge in the public domain. They should come forward to sing the texts in the public domain. Therefore, some efforts need to be made by the government. Reward and recognition from the village level to the state level is possible. Even in Karnataka, folksingers, musicians, artists and craftsmen are getting pension. So, this kind of incentives would help the singers to retain their cultural resources alive.

Nowadays, political parties and social organizations are keen to connect their past glory with the present political system. Culture heroes of the community are compared to the present political heroes. So using mythical and epic characters in a contemporary context is found in the Indian political system.

This process helps the community to maintain their group solidarity and ethnic identity.

Dual Responsibility

It is necessary to sensitize the community on safeguarding the oral epics/myths/caste genealogies so that they will patronize the singers.

Another aspect is to know that the academic domain should contribute to the community from where the oral tradition has been derived and give back to the community with the meaning in it. It is possible that the communities have their own purpose and meaning of the text in their own cultural context, and it might be possible that the unexposed potential strength of the text is not discovered by the community, whereas the scholars through their comparative and analytical skills find new meaning and fit into new context. For example, the drought story can be very well used to sensitize the community to overcome the disaster of drought which is known as narrative therapy. So, the dual responsibility of scholars and community can help save the epics and narratives.

Once the texts are documented, it should be available to all. It is found from the local individual scholars that if someone has collected a piece of oral epic or any oral-text, (s)he is secretive and hesitant to share the data or to disseminate it among the community. Before Internet facilities, this trend was equally found among the scholars who had a newly published book on folklore published abroad. Fortunately, now the scholars of folklore have ample information on global folklore and they can compare their local information with the global one.[6]

It is sure that if Elias Lönnrot would not have shared the *Runos* of Kalevala for 30 years the national epic of Finland would not have been reconstructed or recomposed.

The efforts to share the texts should, both in public domain and academic domain, be free for all.

Application of mythical or epic texts should be useful for research in the disciplines such as Anthropology, History, Linguistics, Literature, and Music. This should be also used as evidence for ethnic identity and achieving power (land, culture, and language).

The epics of Kalahandi have given the people a sense of their history and their destiny. The community wish to learn from their culture heroes to fight and struggle in life. They want to maintain their their cultural values, and regenerate their most profound wishes that is the urge for living; the quest for new invention and solving the riddles of life through human and divine efforts to have a better world in future.

Notes and References

[1] Kalahandi is at crossroads on whether to accept the post-industrial mining companies to allow lifting of aluminium and devastating the Niamgiri Mountain, or to maintain the ecology by discarding the mining company.

[2] Abrahams, Roger, D, (2005) *Everyday Life: A Poetics of Vernacular Practices,* University of Pennsylvania press: p–190.

[3] Eliot's Report on Kalahandi state 28, July 1856, in *Orissa District Gazetteers,* Kalahandi, Gazetteers Unit, Department of Revenue, Government of Orissa, 1980: p–471.

[4] Abrahams, Op cit: p–179.

[5] Bonjo Majhi was a Parghania from Pendraban village of Komna Block who narrated the story.

[6] www.oraltradition.org



Gond Budharaja riding on a horse - a symbol of culture hero as well as his Supreme God Mahadeo - (Siva) found in wooden linga.



Gond village

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Glossary

Aam Burai	mango trees
Adar	cowshed
Adharat	midnight
Adhu bel	afternoon
Adi Niranjan	supreme God
Adinari	first woman
Agni	fire god
Akshara Devata	god of letters
Akhshaya Trutiya	May (auspicious day of sowing the first paddy in the field)
Amar	immortal
Amruta	nectar
Anga Jadi Angapatra	Kondh astrologer
Anna	food
Antra	fire
Artha	economy
Asadh	rainy month
Aswina	October
Ashadha	July, rainy month
Baddevtar Khena	origin myth
Bada dhari	big paddy
Ban haldi	wild turmeric
Bana	flag
Banjara bhat	singer of the Banjara tribe
Bans	bans is a wind instrument made of bamboo
Bansgeet	a narrative song accompanied by the musical instrument bans

Barik	bearer of Sunadi's dress and ornaments; also barber
Bat-muna	a bag of rheumatism
Belbuda	evening
Bentmaru	a man making a rope
Bhadrab	August-September
Bhagya	fate
Bharmall bij ar pad	a type of furious buffalo
Bhat	caste singer
Bhaguals	cowherd-boys
Bhima	son of Vayu
Bhima Sidi	myth of Bhima; the rain God
Bhok-muna	a bag of hunger
Bhurja Patra	kind of leaf on which texts were written
Bohu	brother's wife, sister-in-law
Brahmaveena	a local harp
Burbetal	gin
Chak	habitat; territory
Chakra	wheel; circle
Chandua	bearer of the *chandua* - tent over the worship place, and also during the procession; canopy
Chasa nirnaya	knowledge about Paddy cultivation
Chatu	cooking spoon
Chaura Dongara	big mountain in Kalahandi
Chhatra	umbrella, also the bamboo pole covered with clothes of the goddess, worshipped during the worship
Chhaya	shadow
Chihirakuta bel	a time fixed for husking of perched rice early morning
Chimta	pliers
Chok	territory, circle
Chor	stealer of fig fruit
Chowkidar	messenger
Dasahara	a ten day festival celebrated in the month of October
Dan	alms
Dada	elder brother
Dak Pulsia	police
Danava	demon

Deshachar	regional culture
Dendo	a non-poisonous snake
Deva	God
Devakula	clan Gods
Dharma	ethics
Dharma Devta	sun god
Dharnimata	earth mother goddess
Dholia	drummer
Dhundhunia	one stringed instrument
Dhuniraksen	old woman demon
Dhurua	bearer of carpet, also the name of a tribe
Dom	a musician caste, scheduled caste
Duarabandha	wooden door
Dudbhai	breast-milk brothers
Dukh-muna	a bag of miseries
Duma	the ancestral spirit; clan god
Dumer	fig
Durbar	court
Gada	club
Gadi	throne
Gai Goth	cow shed
Gai-charau	cowherd
Gandhu Paradhia	culture hero of the paharia
Garhs	kingdom
Garuda	kaka
Gaur	milkman caste
Gayalpod	wild buffaloes
Geet Kudias	male singer
Geet Kudien	female singer
Ghana	shafts
Ghani	churning machine
Ghati	small hilly road
Ghatparia	boatman
Giri	hill
Gomata	mother cow

Gothbhatha	a place in the jungle – an opening where all cows are kept in cowshed
Gova-Jani	the main priest who sings the mythical song
Grampali	village God
Gudi	worship hut
Guru	master
Haldhila	untying of bullocks in the morning
Halia	agriculture labourers
Hapus	wind machine
Hasni	laughter
Hatia	banjara hero
Hatidhara song	song on capture of elephant
Heera Mriga	diamond deer
Hida	land
Jaira	buffalo
Jalki	mud pit, a name of the village near manikgarh
Jamin	agricultural field
Janamkhena	creation myth
Janra	name of the buffalo
Jantra	machine
Japan	worship
Jati Janam	creation myth, caste myth
Jeth	May-June
Jhapi	round-shaped bamboo box where the dress and ornaments of the goddess are preserved
Jharigadu	water pot
Jharia	water fountain
Jhankar	priest
Jog-Jani	the priest who makes the worship place sacred on an auspicious day
Joshi	astrologer
Juhar	obeisance, salutations
Kachhra	dirt
Kachhim	tortoise
Kachhra Dhurua	a cultural hero of the Bhunjias
Kadams	million

Kadli kachhar	plantain field
Kaivarta Geet	origin of Kaivarta caste from Brahma and Vishnu; sacred book of the fisherfolk
Kakra	crab
Kalar	liquor vendor
Kalia	black
Kalpa	eighty-four years
Kama	procreation
Kamandalu	jug
Kandhni	weeping
Kandul	pulses
Kankaradharu	crab catcher
Karma	work
Karri	sword
Kasla-dhan	a kind of paddy
Kath	carpenter
kavyas	epics
Kenchua	earthworm
Khadi	chalk
Khalari Yatra	festival of Khalari devi, in Chhatishgarh bordering Nuapada district of Orissa
Khapri	earthen tar
Khoger	horse jinn
Khut-Jani	the priest who rears the buffalo and ties it to a wooden post for sacrifice
Khursa	pulses
Kikri	fiddle- like musical instrument used by the Gond bard
Kodi	one kodi is equal to 20 carts
Kilas	seeds
Kira	insect, germ
Kok(ua)	wild dog(s)
Kokaaduma	ancestors
Kondhmeli song	song of Kondh rebellion
Kopar	a wooden instrument used to level land
Kos	one kos is 3km
Kukradaka	calling of cock early in the morning

Kul Vana	clan symbol
Kulachar	clan customs
Kulat	steps
Kurmel sandh	a name of the furious bull
Kurmi	earth digger
Kusla	ropes
Labhan	bullock man
Lada	fire in the rope (like torch)
Lada palka	trading of salt
Lakshmi Janma	birth of Goddess Lakshmi
Lal bangla	kitchen
Lokachar	local culture
Luhra	blacksmith
Mahal	palace
Mai	mother
Maidhan	noon
Mali	gardener
Mallas	wrestler
Mamu	uncle
Mandia	corn
Mani	precious stone
Manika	name of the bull
Manikya	pearls
Manjapur	earth
Mantra	magical chant, hymn
Margasira	January
Markam	mango, a clan totem of the Gond
Martya	earth
Mausi	mother's sister
Maya	illusion
Miligidi Banr	name of a cultivation field
Modo	altar
Mohini-maya	illusion of attracting a woman by medicine or mantra
Moksha	salvation
Morhei	peacock

Nag	serpent
Nagakula	Serpent clan
Nai	barber
Nanad	husband's sister
Nani	girl
Narmanja	human beings
Netam	dog
Ningiala bhuasen	recently married women
Nirakar	formless
Nishan, Muhuri	musical instruments
Nuakharf	September
Nuakhai	new rice eating festival in September
Padma	lotus
Padmasana	a posture in yoga
Pagdi	turban
Paicda	underworld
Paiks	soldiers
Painri	foot ornaments
Pal	carpet
Pandri	fifteen days
Pangan-nashan	witch craft and magic
Panji	astrologer's book
Pataks	castes
Patala	water
Patkhanda	sword
Patkhanda	magical sword
Paik	minister
Penance	tapasya
Pitkhusi	clan goddess
Pod puja	buffalo sacrifice
Kumhar	Potter
Pujari	shaman
Puranas	myths
Purja	caste genealogy
Purun patar	lotus leaves

Pushpak Viman	chariot of Kuvera which was taken by Ravana of Lanka
Puti	1 puti is about 80 kilogram
Raet	night
Rai haldi	royal turmeric
Rajuda	aristocratic
Ranchuan	well with golden water
Rata mati	red soil
Robi dang	churning rod
Rohini	sun's wife
Sachi	God Indra's wife
Sadki	wooden musical instrument
Saga	eight clan
Sagar	big ponds
Sakkhsuhaka	a goat-sacrifice to appease the goddess
Sali	wife's sister
Salidhana	paddy field
Saliva	uchhista
Sambar	deer
Sankha	conch
Shatru jati	enemy castes
Spika	whip
Sianlok(g)	senior persons of Gond community
Sos-muna	a bag of thirst
Sravana	August
Sudanga	underground path
Sukh-muna	a bag of happiness
Suna	gold
Surya	Sun God
Swarga	heaven
Tadi	musician
Tamba Khuria pod	a buffalo with copper coloured hooves
Tamra	copper
Tantra	esoteric knowledge
Tapasya	penance
Toki parab	a female infanticide ritual

Tumdi-bihan-Rog-muna	a bag of diseases
Uden puden ghoda	flying horse
Umbei	fire pot
Unga	arm pit
Upabita	sacred thread
Vana	the caste symbol
Vanakanya	forest girl with miraculous powers
Vayu	wind God
Vedas	sacred book of hindus
Gauntia	village headman
Vishwakarma	blacksmith
Vrahmaveena	a one-stringed musical instrument that resonates the mandradhwani
Yogi	ascetic, tantric caste

Index

This book is a compilation of the oral epics sung by the ethnic and folk singers of Kalahandi. The narratives are about the life history of the people across time and space. The singers, narrators, ethnic bards exhibit their rich creative expression that vibrates their story of love and story of struggle. This compilation represents the tribal and non-tribal epics performed in the community as the traditional wisdom and knowledge perpetuated across the ages.

Mahendra Kumar Mishra is a scholar in Indian Folklore. He is the recipient of Orissa Sahitya Academy award for his work *Folklore of Kalahandi*. For the past 10 years Mishra has been working on using language and folklore in primary education under the Orissa Multilingual Education Project for ten indigenous languages. At present Mishra is the State Tribal Education Coordinator in the Department of School and Mass Education, Government of Orissa, India.

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